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Love Stories of the American Gir

July 26

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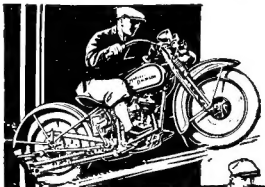

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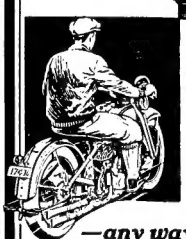

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ALL-STORY

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Love Takes the Trail

Their hands met and clung, then Jean turned away.

In the midst of that white wilderness love came to them. Then the icy silence claimed her lover and Jean took a lonely trail

By Floria Howe Bruess

JEAN stood drawing on her elbow-length fur mittens, eyes moving from the long line of stalwart dogs to the packed sledge, and on to old Misca who bent over it, tightening a strap.

"Well, we're off, mother mine." She imprinted a kiss on the woman's cheek; then turned to her father. "I'll be back when the epidemic's checked. Don't look so serious, dad. This is what I took my nurse's training course

for—to help in sickness. And I'll be safe on the trip, for Misca is with me."

She flashed a smile at the old Indian who had years ago canoed her and her mother, safely, hundreds of miles, to rejoin Sam Newhouse, awaiting them in Rampart. Faithful Misca who would lay down his life, if necessary, to protect her, who had taught her the wood-lore of Alaska, and the use of the rifle and the skinning knife, the bow and arrow, the paddle.

"Good luck, Jean," her father called as she stepped on the stern step of the long sledge.

The girl waved her hand, gave the "mush" cry, and the dogs scampered down the snow-banked street of Rampart, Misca on snowshoes beside them.

Jean's parents stood watching the splendid young figure clad in seal parka, the big hood encircling a glowing, vivid face. Knee-length caribou-hide moccasins inclosed her slender young feet and legs.

"Better come in, mother. The air is bitter," Sam Newhouse said finally.

"We can be proud of our girl. The Indian runners who brought word said they were dying like flies over in Keeona. Only one doctor and no nurse. Our girl will help save many lives," he went on quietly.

"I am proud of her, Sam. But I'm always a little anxious when she leaves on one of these trips in winter."

They turned, stepped into the warm, cheery house, and shut the door on the icy world without.

WITHIN twenty miles of the village of Keeona, the blizzard came riding on the wind. The frost-rimmed trees drifted by like phantoms; the air was as white as the landscape.

"We'd better lie over until the blow lessens, Misca." Jean stared over the hills. "There's an old shack near here, you remember—"

"Down in the valley, if it still stands. It is good shelter," Misca answered quietly.

It took them two hours to reach the forlorn little shack which a prospector had abandoned. The ice glaze was thick on the one window; the step leading to the door sagged, rotting.

The girl sprang from the sledge, fought her way through the ice-laden wind to the door. She raised the latch and stepped in, leaving Misca to care for the dogs and bring in the pack.

The wind caught at the door, shaking it viciously, as though it would tear it from its hinges. Jean needed all her strength to close it.

That done, she started to the wide, stone-hooded hearth, then stopped, eyes widening.

In front of the hearth, huddled in a split-log chair, lay a young man. His eyes were closed; his breath came so faint no vapor from it could be seen trailing on the bitter air. His fine face was blue, pinched with cold; his lips cracked, blackened with frost.

A pile of wood, cut to hearth length, lay near the open grate, yet no fire or warm ashes smoldered in its depths. Evidently the young fellow had reached this shelter and had been overcome before he succeeded in building a fire.

Swiftly Jean sprang forward, stripped off her mittens, pressed her fingers on his wrist. His pulse was feeble, intermittent.

She turned to the hearth, worked quickly. When the old man entered, bearing the pack comprising blankets, sleeping bags and food kit, the fire was roaring out its warmth into the Arctic chill of the cabin.

Even Misca's impassive dark eyes widened as he saw the young man Jean was succoring.

"A traveler, Misca. Without dogs or sled, for we saw none outside. He is overcome with exhaustion and cold, perhaps hunger."

"There are no tracks of dogs or sled. Even no tracks of moccasins around the shack. The traveler has come with the furtive, stealthy step of the wilderness fur," Misca said in his tribal tongue that Jean understood as well as her own language.

She raised frowning eyes to the wrinkled old face. She did not like his expression, "furtive step." Then her eyes turned compassionately on the pinched, drawn face of the stranger.

"Carry him over there," she directed crisply, motioning to the bunk that was built into a corner of the room. It was covered by an old, laced mattress of hay and grass.

Swiftly Jean threw a blanket on it, and Misca lifted the man—who was, in fact, little more than boy—and deposited him on the bunk.

The girl drew back the parka hood from his face, and gently smoothed the thick hair from his brow, her heart strangely stirred, tender with pity.

"I will cook the meal, Misca. You draw off his boots and see if his feet are frozen. If so, get to work on them at once. His hands are all right. Just a little frost-bitten," she said as she rubbed them briskly between her own.

At that moment the young man opened his eyes, stared up at her, blankly at first, then wonderingly. At last his eyes left her eager, vivid face and roamed around the cabin. Jean saw recollection flash into them; recollection followed by fear. She had often seen that look in the eyes of an animal at bay!

"You're coming out of it. That's good. Do you feel warm now? I'll have something hot for you to eat very soon," she said softly.

He sat up and stared at Misca, who was drawing off his boots.

"Who are you?" he asked, in a voice hoarse and cracked from long exposure and exhaustion.

"I'm a nurse. With my Indian dog-driver, I'm on my way to Keeona, the half-breed settlement. There's a great deal of sickness there."

As his eyes still questioned, she went on: "A blizzard is raging—hear it? We knew of this shack, so sought shelter here for the night, and you'd already found it."

SHE winced at the flash of relief that filled his young face, that lighted his haggard eyes. What was wrong with this splendid-looking boy? What had Misca said—"furtive steps"?

"His feet are frozen," the Indian told her, in his slow, unhurried voice.

"Oh, how dreadful! Quick, Misca, you know what to do—"

Swiftly the Indian filled a deep pan with snow. Sitting on the floor, he pulled the young man lower on the bunk and buried the frozen feet in the snow.

"What is your name?" the patient asked the girl.

"Jean. Jean Newhouse. And yours?"

A spasm of pain twitched his face. "I—call me Dave."

"I like it. And now I must get our supper." She turned quickly and set to work, and as she prepared the meal she heard Misca working over the boy's feet, vigorously rubbing, briskly slapping.

Soon an appetizing aroma filled the

room, an aroma of broiling reindeer steak, of coffee, of bannock—the Northern camp bread cakes—browning crisply in the red charcoal.

Jean filled a tin plate, cut a steak into small pieces, and drawing a box to the low-built bunk, she sat beside Dave.

"You come first. You'll need food to strengthen you for the siege that is coming." She smiled gently at him.

"Siege?" he repeated, startled.

"Your feet. Have you ever frozen them before? The pain is hideous, after circulation starts."

"Oh!" And she wondered at the relief in his voice.

Famished though he undoubtedly was, she noted that he controlled himself. He did not eat wolfishly, as she had seen starving men eat.

When the well-filled plate was empty: "Had enough?" she asked smilingly.

"Thanks, yes. It was wonderful." He looked up at her, a faint color in his face now, his eyes clear, blue as steel. "You're mighty good to me." There was something very boyish in the simple words of thanks.

Involuntarily the girl's warm brown fingers closed over his. There was friendship, trust, in the charming little gesture.

"Why shouldn't I be? You would have done the same for me. You know our Alaskan code. Ah! It is beginning?" For he gave a little gasp of pain.

Misca rose. "No more to do," he said gravely. "The blood begins to run again through his feet."

Jean nodded as he covered Dave's feet warmly with the blanket. Then she turned to her own supper, realizing for the first time the hunger that assailed her.

She ate rapidly, eyes on the boy's face that twitched, grew gray with agony.

The north wind, inescapable, mighty, roared about the little building. The mystery, vastness and tragedy of the great wilderness lay around them. Only this little shack with its roaring fire stood between them and the icy arms of the white death. There was no sound save the shriek of the gale; all forest creatures were snug in their retreats while the wintry monarch of the forest reigned.

Jean washed the tins with warm water from melted snow. Misca opened and warmed the sleeping bags, made ready for the night.

For an hour she sat by Dave, watching the turning of his pain-racked body. Occasionally she felt his feet, which were hot and swollen.

Yet no groan, no whimper came from his gray, set lips. She marveled, for she had heard men scream when frozen members had begun pumping the blood through congested veins.

Yet his silence seemed more terrible to her than screams as she watched the sweat drop from his brow, and saw how deep his teeth had gone into his under lip.

"You suffer so dreadfully," she said, a little catch in her voice. "I can relieve you. I have opiates in my medicine kit."

"No, no. You shall not. Understand me? I will not have my brain clouded by opiates. I must keep my mind clear. Don't give me dope—promise me—no matter what my pain is. Promise me!"

He caught her hands fiercely. Troubled, a little sick at heart, she looked into his burning blue eyes.

"Very well. I promise." And her voice came strained.

"You are an angel," he said hoarse-

ly, releasing her hands and falling back.

Misca stood over her. "Sleep," he said. "I will watch with him."

She bent over Dave, who looked at her with yearning eyes. "A few more hours and it will be over. Then sleep. No one will disturb us, for no living creature is abroad this night."

He caught her hand, held it to his cheek while his breath came half-sobbing, half-panting; then, with an inarticulate little cry he dropped it abruptly and turned his face to the wall.

FOR a long time Jean lay in her sleeping bag facing the open fire. Her eyes were somber. Who was this man? Why had he told her nothing about himself? Where had he come from, where was he going?

Her eyes fell on his pack that he had evidently thrown into a corner when he stumbled into the shack. A board pack it was, made to be worn on a man's back.

No sled, no dogs. And the revolver that hung in its holster from his hip! Men did not carry revolvers in Alaska. Rifles, yes, to kill game and for protection from furred beasts. The trouble in Jean's eyes deepened, but after a long time she slept. At dawn she awakened, sprang to her feet, bathed face and hands.

Then she walked to Dave and stood gazing down at him. Misca raised questioning eyes, as she lightly laid her finger tips on the boy's cheek.

"Fever," she whispered. "His feet cause it."

Though her touch had been light as the touch of a bird's wing, Dave felt it in his sleep. He sat up, stared wildly a moment; then his eyes lighted as they met Jean's anxious gaze.

"I'm fine," he said impulsively, a smile deep in his handsome eyes. "No pain."

"But they throb, don't they?" she asked.

"Oh, yes. Terribly hot. But they'll soon be all right."

He reached out a hand, and she laid her own in it. Misca rose, set about preparing breakfast, and Jean dropped into his chair.

"How good you've been to me," the boy said huskily. "You've been an angel. All kindness and—no questions." Abruptly he changed the subject. "Talk to me! I'm hungry to hear your voice. Tell me about yourself, will you? Where do you live?"

With her hand in his; with her eyes soft, dark as velvet on his own, she told him everything he wanted to know.

After a time Misca drew the battered old table up to the bunk. On it stood a steaming hot meal: frozen fish, thawed and fried; cornmeal cakes; boiling-hot coffee.

"Time eat," he said. "I feed dogs."

It was a happy breakfast they ate together, these two young things drawn irresistibly to each other by a power mysterious, compelling—something old as the world yet ever new, the power of love.

Their eyes lingered on each other's and withdrew reluctantly. Yet there was something deep in the man's that told of unhappiness.

As Jean bent over him to take the empty tin coffee cup from his hand, his fingers met hers and there was something electric in the touch, something that passed from one to the other that made their blood quicken and their hearts throb.

Jean's gravely sweet eyes shone; Dave's blue ones grew almost black with emotion. Suddenly he dropped

her hand and covered his face with his arm.

The girl looked down at him wistfully; then silently she turned, pulled back the rough board table and cleared a place for Misca's breakfast.

The blizzard still raged. The wind tore at the little building and shook it. Jean dared not face the fury of it—this wind that came with death on its wings. So she stayed.

The day passed swiftly for her, busy over her patient, and with the cooking of meals. Hours that fled all too swiftly she spent seated beside Dave, talking to him, intent on banishing that hunted look from his eyes.

Occasionally they laughed together. It seemed the most natural thing in the world that their hands should meet and cling.

THE second morning the storm was over. She must no longer delay. She must mush on, carrying the serum that would save the lives of many children. She must give her strength and ability to the stricken. Yet—*Dave*—

"Misca," she said when breakfast was over, "I go on to the village alone. You must remain here until Dave can use his feet. He must not attempt to stand on them for several days. If he recovers and wishes to continue his journey before I return, then you join me at the village."

She turned to look at the boy who lay watching her, his face strained, his eyes yearning.

"Don't get up too soon, Dave," she warned, and turned away from him, her heart heavy.

Misca finished his breakfast, took the ax from his pack. "I go now to get more wood," he said.

When the door closed behind him, Jean gathered her pack together. It was very light now, for she was leaving the blankets, food and sleeping bags. Only her personal kit and her big medicine kit would go with her. For less than eight miles lay between her and the village.

With his haunting eyes Dave watched her. When all was ready she walked slowly to the bunk.

"You heard what I told Misca?" she asked in a faltering voice.

"Yes."

"I hate to leave you, but it is life or death for many children—"

"I understand."

"Misca is good. He is a fine man, even though his skin is red. He will care for you."

"Jean!"

From a pent-up, hungry heart the cry was forced. He held out his arms.

"Dave, oh, Dave!" she breathed tremulously. And she went into his arms as sweetly, as naturally, as unashamed as love itself.

"My wonderful girl, my darling."

Like a flood, love swept them, breaking down all barriers, all restraints.

"I love you," he told her.

"And I love you," she answered.

There was something infinitely tender, overwhelmingly sweet in their kiss.

"My wonderful girl! And I have not told you—" His face darkened; all joy fled from his eyes.

"There are things you need not tell me. Things I know. I know you are brave, fine, honorable," Jean said proudly.

"You love me — on trust?" And there was a wonderful light in his face.

"I do. I know there is something strange about your being here, without dogs, or sled. And you haven't explained, but I trust you."

He looked at her, eyes shining. "I cannot tell you now, Jean, but when I can—"

She sat on a chair drawn to the bunk; their arms were entwined, cheek pressed to cheek. Murmured words—

Misca entered, bringing a great armful of wood. Jean rose and slipped on her parka. "Harness the dogs, Misca. I am leaving at once," she directed.

"Wait for me here, Dave. I shan't be over a month, and your feet must be strong before you leave. If you use them too soon you'll have trouble."

Their lips met, clung as though they never could part.

The tinkle of harness bells sounded above the drone of the wind. Tenderly Jean released herself. Her gravely sweet face smiled down at him; her velvet-soft eyes clung to his face.

"Until I see you again, Dave—good-by," she murmured softly, and was gone.

A moment later Misca entered, picked up her pack and took it out to the sled.

Dave sat up, listening intently. He heard her voice, high, clear, sweet as bells.

"Mush, Charlie! Mush, Wolf! Hi, hi, Rex!" There was a yelping of dogs, a tinkle of bells, the scrape of runners against the hard snow, then silence, save for the drone of the wind.

For a moment Dave's eyes shone like blue fire, as he stared ahead. Then that fire dimmed under narrowed, thoughtful lids. His boyish look faded into the expression of a grim, determined man.

RADIANTLY happy, for she loved, and believed herself to be loved, Jean drove the scampering dogs over hill, through valley, through the heart of wilderness to the stricken village.

If a cloud occasionally obscured the sun of her happiness she would brush it away with the optimism of love and youth.

"When Dave is ready he will tell me about himself," she whispered confidently. "And in the meantime I will wait, patiently and unafraid—for I love him."

The going was slow, for the drifts were heavy. Three hours later she drove into the village. The doctor was leaving his cabin on his day's round when Jean pulled up at his steps.

"Here you are," he exclaimed, a swift smile lighting his weary face. "You brought everything I ordered?"

"Everything," Jean answered happily. "All the medicines, serum and sterile gauze."

"Good. Now I've work, and plenty of it, for you, young lady. Can you start now, or are you tired?"

"Fresh as a daisy. Ready to snap right into it," she responded.

Then began a burden of work that she shouldered joyfully. She was assistant to the doctor, nurse to the sick, comforter to the dying, a rock of strength to the bereaved.

For, born in American Alaska, Jean knew these people, understood their simplicity and childlikeness, sympathized with their emotions.

The days passed swiftly. The weather cleared. Sunlight streamed and danced on the white world. Deep shadows rested for hours on drifts as though asleep.

Jean, at midday dinner in the home of the missionary, whose guest she was, looked up as a knock fell on the door. The missionary's wife threw open the door and Misca stepped into the room.

The girl whitened; her hand went to her throat. Why had he come so soon? Only ten days—Dave surely had not—

She rose quickly, and after her hosts had greeted Misca, led him to her room.

"Quick, tell me," she urged, fear making her voice unsteady.

Jean waved once before she turned to the waiting team

"This morning at dawn he left," Misca answered in his own tongue.

"Left? But was he able? Give me the letter he gave you for me!"

"His feet were heavy, but he said he had to go on. He could wait no longer. He gave me no letter."

"No letter? Misca, surely he left a message for me?" Frantically she grasped the Indian's arm.

With his melancholy aged eyes he looked at her. "He told me to say to you: 'Tell her I do not forget.' That is all. And he left."

No note. No written word of love, of assurance, comfort. Jean pressed her hands to her eyes. After a moment: "Which way did he go, Misca?"

"East. I watched him as long as I could see him."

East! Away from Rampart. Out into the frozen wilderness, on feet not yet strong—

"Miss Jean, come quick! Nee-Na's child is worse!" the missionary's voice rang down the hall. Duty called, the bugle call of duty! There was no time for her own grief, her own fears.

Days filled to the brim and running over; nights, so weary, sleep claimed her as soon as her head touched the pillow. Dreams, disturbing, unhappy—Dave, where are you? Couldn't you send me one little word of explanation?

Gradually the epidemic yielded to skill and medicine. The day came when no new cases developed; the sick were convalescent, many entirely recovered.

"It's over, little nurse," the doctor said wearily. "What a brick you've been! There's not another girl in the North like you. I'm going to mention your name in my report to Washington."

His words trailed away. He slept in his chair. Jean called Misca, who lifted the man, laid him on a couch and covered him warmly. The doctor slept on.

"I'll rest a couple of days, Misca, and then we'll return," Jean said warmly. "And, Misca"—as he turned to leave the room—"we will take the east trail."

A flicker of surprise was in the impassive dark eyes.

"You know the east trail is much longer?" he pointed out.

"I know. Yet we'll take it and circle around to Rampart."

Misca left the room quietly. "He whose eyes hold the blue of fire and the blue of ice took the east trail," the old man muttered.

THE weather held fine and clear; the trail was well crusted, and traveling was fast. Through a silence, broken only by the drone of wind, the crack of trees splitting in the frost, and the distant howl of wolves, Jean and Misca sped through the wilderness.

Occasionally they stopped during the days, and the Indian pointed a finger at something Jean, versed in woodlore as she was, would have passed, unseeing.

"The traveler camped here," he would say. "He tried to cover all traces of his campfire, but the Indian's eyes are sharper than the white man's. See!"

Jean bent over a pile of snow that held only a light crust, in contrast to the deep crust on surrounding snow. She watched Misca scrape away that snow, and beneath was revealed a large flat rock, burned clean by fire. Buried still deeper were pieces of charred wood, and bones picked clean.

Jean's heart beat fast. Had this been Dave's camp? Rolled in blankets close to the fire had he slept under the Arctic sky? And she had her tent, protected from wind, from the icy breath of the bitter nights.

Why, why had he gone on? Why the hurry? If he had only waited for her—she stifled the sob that sprang to her lips.

Each day Misca's finger pointed out the well-concealed camping place, though Jean's eyes, search as they would, could never distinguish it first.

"He was on his way to the half-breed settlement on Wampus River," Misca said, on their fourth day out.

"It looks that way," Jean replied. And the fear for Dave's safety; the obsession that had driven her in this roundabout way home, was relieved. Dave had evidently made it. His feet had not given out. What desperate courage! And why was he so intent on reaching this settlement?

"It is just as near now, Misca, to take this trail home?"

"Just as near," he answered.

So they continued on, and another day found them at the edge of the clearing in which the village stood.

Jean's heart throbbed, and her eyes sparkled. Would she see Dave? Surely the lone traveler on the trail had been Dave. They had passed no other person, and Misca had watched him turn east.

Surely she would not be disappointed. She could not bear disappointment now. Loyal love had carried her on patiently, dauntlessly, so many miles through this icy world where Dave might be in danger.

"I'd like to surprise him, Misca," Jean said, making no attempt at concealment.

Wise Misca knew who she thought

the traveler was. "Wait here, then, and I'll go into the village and find out if a white man is there," he said, fixing his sad eyes on her penetratingly.

Impatiently Jean waited. If he found Dave he would send him to her; she would await him here. To see him again and hear his voice! She sat in the sled, heart racing, cheeks flushing. The dogs seized the respite to drop to the snow and sleep.

The time slipped by, and at last Misca returned. "A white man with eyes blue as the sky and hair brown as the tree bark is in the village. He came into the village limping."

"Dave! Did you see him?"

"Yes, I saw him come out of a cabin and I followed him to another. Shall I take you to it? It is the last cabin on the right, near this end of the clearing."

"I'll go alone. You wait here, Misca. The last cabin, you said?" Eagerly, her excitement mounting, Jean hurried to the village.

The last cabin. Ah, this was it! "I won't knock. I'll go around through the wood shed," she murmured.

In the North a shed holding a huge quantity of wood is always built on to the rear of a cabin, and a door opens from the cabin into the shed.

"How surprised he'll be! 'Tell her I do not forget.' No, you have not forgotten, Dave. I know you love me even if you left no other message for me. But you 'do not forget'—me or our love."

Eyes glowing, lips tender, parted with expectation, Jean slipped to the rear of the house. Softly she opened the door leading to the wood house. Should she knock? But she longed to open the door, if only a crack, and surprise Dave, caught unaware of her presence.

She hesitated a moment, hand on the knob. A sound of talking came to her. It was—it was his voice! She leaned against the door, faintness sweeping over her.

"How I love him," she thought swiftly, "that merely his voice can do this to me!"

Dave's voice came louder. It was his voice, yet there was a different quality in it, a quality she had not heard before. Some one was with him, or perhaps this cabin belonged to another and he was only a guest?

A pang of disappointment seized her. Their reunion must not be shared by another. Her wonderful surprise was, for the moment, spoiled.

Now the girl heard him distinctly:

"Musette, have a heart. I've gone through hell trying to find you. And now that I have, won't you—" His voice fell to a pleading note.

She shrank back as though a lash had struck her. Dave—and a woman! Oh, no, not that! Yet the words rang in her ears like the tolling of a bell. A woman? She must see her!

With icy but steady hand, she pushed the door ajar. There they were, in her direct line of vision. The girl faced her, and Jean looked into a dark, beautiful face, the eyes, liquid pools black as midnight and as mysterious, upraised to Dave's.

As Jean stared sickeningly, the girl gave a little rush and threw herself into the man's arms.

JEAN closed the door, carefully, slowly. For a few moments she stood as one stricken by paralysis, incapable of movement. The slow, heavy beating of her heart shook her body. She turned and carefully, slowly, crossed the wood shed, opened the outside door and stepped out.

Moving like a sleepwalker, she skirted the house, reached the snowy path that led to the edge of the clearing.

Misca awaited her. When she saw him she swayed blindly, and he picked her up, put her into the sled, covered her warmly with bear robes.

He gazed with inscrutable eyes at her wan, pinched face. How different she looked from the girl who had left the sled a few moments ago! How radiant she had been then; starry-eyed, eager, tremulous—

"We take the trail?" he asked in his deep voice.

"Take me home, Misca. Oh, take me home." Her voice shook.

He nodded; called to the dogs, and the sled slipped from the village onto the trail.

The trip to Rampart was a nightmare to Jean. A deep and terrible shadow lay in her fine eyes, a shadow that told of disillusion, of outraged love, of trust betrayed. There was a new compression in the lines of her sensitive lips.

But when they reached home she had herself well in hand. Pride had come to fortify her; her parents must not know.

And they suspected nothing of the tears crushed back until the throat ached, of the long, wakeful nights, eyes staring through the darkness of her room.

Content in her life heretofore, she developed restlessness. Days that had fled so swiftly now dragged their long aching length.

"I wish, oh, I wish I could leave Alaska. I wish I could go over the water to Seattle, Portland, any place," she told herself many times. "I must forget Dave, but here, it is so hard to forget."

On Sunday morning she sang at church. How could she sing, she thought, when asked to take the soloist's place. Yet, when the time came it was not so impossible. She sang, and her broken heart seemed to be crying out to its Maker in the hymn. As she finished, the girl looked down at a man, a stranger, who sat a few seats away. She had been conscious of his gaze fixed on her ever since she rose to sing. His hard, light eyes, glinting like steel, drew her as if they were magnets.

She did not know what was in his feverish thoughts:

"Tender, sympathetic, beautiful and pure as the ice of glaciers. I want her—I've fallen for her at first sight."

Systematically, then, John Farrel set about his campaign. There were reasons why he did not care to tarry too long; he had been headed for the Canadian border when forced to turn into Rampart for purchases. He knew it was not wise to linger; he knew that he should hurry on; but the girl had cast over him a spell.

At first her absolute indifference maddened him, for he was not accustomed to indifference. Love or—fear, had ever been meted him.

Jean merely tolerated the man. He was entertaining; almost he succeeded in dulling for a few hours the pain at her heart. Her father seemed to enjoy John's company, and almost every night he shared their evening meal.

He was much traveled, a man from the "outside," in Alaska on mining interests, so he told them. He had stayed overlong, and had been caught by winter before he realized it.

"Evidently he is remaining here on Jean's account. I can see he is very much in love with her." Mrs. Newhouse looked questioningly at her husband.

"Do you know how Jean feels?" Sam asked.

The woman shook her head. "She hasn't said a word. Yet, perhaps it would be a good marriage for our girl. She is so restless; she seems to have been unhappy since her return from Keeona. Something has changed Jean."

"She's young. Perhaps she longs for a little of the life John Farrel has pictured. And the gay times she has read about in magazines and books. I don't blame her," Sam replied thoughtfully.

Jean shrank from the ardor revealed in John's eyes; shrank from his lingering handclasp. Yet his conversation, his unusual personality attracted her.

THE evening came when he knew he must play his last card. Her parents were visiting a neighbor when he called, and he breathed a sigh of satisfaction at finding the coast clear.

After a brief, desultory conversation he turned to the girl, conscious that he was holding himself in leash, curbed the mad desire to crush her in his arms, to drain her sweet lips of kisses.

"Jean," he said, composure in his voice, veiled fire in his eyes; "you know why I have lingered on here? You know what has held me?"

She looked at him uneasily.

He brushed aside the silence that fell between them.

"I love you, I love you madly. I never dreamed I could love as I do you. I've not been a particularly good man, Jean. I need the sweet influence a girl such as you could exert over me."

He thought swiftly as he spoke: "That's a good line. A type like her will respond to that. Tell her I need her—for the good of my soul!" A mirthless smile was in his lowered eyes.

"Marry me, Jean. Let me take you out into the world where you belong. It is a crime to bury such beauty, such sweetness as yours, up here in the North. I'll make you happy. All my love, all my devotion is yours. Marry me, Jean—I need you so! Sometimes I feel I am a good seed, rotting in a rotten soil. But you could make a big man of me, Jean—and a good one."

Jean could sense the bulldog in the man, the steel will behind the polished exterior. But she did not know he was a man used to triumphing over all obstacles; the victorious fulfillment of his desires being a creed to him.

And he loved her; in his ruthless way he loved her. Never had he so desired a woman. She was to him a fire that ate at his heart.

Jean forced herself to look at him. She saw the glinting eyes, the strong nose, the out-thrusting, aggressive chin, the thin-lipped mouth. Repression in that mouth; cruelty, too—but also strength.

Prominent on him was a look of restless, virile energy. He was not a man who could sit and watch life pass by; but one who needs must take an active part in life. His figure, tall, thin, was tense now as he met her eyes. His fingers long, extraordinarily supple, beat restively against the arm of his chair.

"But I do not love you," she said simply.

"I know you don't, but give me time. After marriage love will come." For the first time in his life he was on the verge of panic. He could not, would not lose her!

"Don't refuse me, Jean. I will be a wrecked man if you do. I shall all my

life wander from pillar to post like a storm-wrecked, lost bark. Is there no pity in that tender heart of yours? Don't be afraid. I love you. I'll be so good to you." He paused, at the end of his resources.

Shaken by the man's desperate urge, feeling her sympathy—that warm, sacrificing sympathy of her rich nature—reaching out to him, Jean nevertheless recoiled from the look in his eyes.

To give herself—her lips, her life—to this man, when with all her warm heart she loved another! Yet how had that other rewarded her love?

"Even when he was telling me he loved me," Jean thought bitterly, "he no doubt was thinking of that girl, the girl he suffered tortures for. Perhaps he was laughing at me, thinking how easy I was! And there's some mystery about Dave, besides. He wouldn't tell me who he was, nor where he came from, while John has been so open, so frank. We know all about *him.*"

"*Jean,* of what are you thinking?" John's voice broke in on her unhappy musing.

She looked at him, her eyes level, straight.

"It is only fair to tell you, though I say it in confidence—I don't want my parents to know. But I must tell you that I love another man."

Swift, devouring jealousy and rage ran through John's veins like quicksilver. But he smothered the imprecation that rose to his lips, and instantly leashed himself in an iron control.

"Then I am too late?" His voice was very low.

"And this man does not love me," she continued as though he had not spoken.

"Does not love you? Then he does not want you, or need you? You are unhappy over his indifference? Jean, the surest and quickest cure would be marriage with another. It will surprise you how quickly you'll forget him. And happiness, contentment will replace your unhappiness."

She looked at him thoughtfully. No doubt he knew; he had seen much of life. He was fully ten years older than she—and Dave. She drew a long, unsteady breath.

"I want so to be happy. I've been so miserable ever since—" She paused. "Sometimes it seems as though I can't go on living."

"Marry me to-morrow, Jean," he interrupted swiftly, pressing his advantage. "I will take you away, make you happy. Soon you will forget this man ever lived."

The girl hesitated. Well, why not? Life here was unendurable. It was killing her. Without allowing herself time for further thought she said desperately:

"Very well. I will marry you to-morrow."

He drew a deep, exultant breath. "And we'll leave at once!"

Miserably she nodded. The door opened and Mrs. Newhouse entered. John Farrel turned to her, and after he had told their plans, he left.

"I have succeeded," he told himself triumphantly. "And at the last moment. I dared not remain here another day. I am uneasy now. To think I've made such a fool of myself — taken such chances—for a moll! When I know how many of the boys have gone up the river for a long stretch in stir, just because of a dame. One more day and I'm across the border and on my way to the States."

That night Jean lay, wide questioning eyes gazing into the darkness. Occasionally she shivered as though very cold. To-morrow she would be John's

wife. "Oh, Dave, Dave, how could you? You played with my love—I must forget you—must—must."

It was John's wish that the wedding should be strictly private, and Jean was only too willing. To get it over quickly, that was the thing. So, in the presence of only her parents, she married him the following morning at ten o'clock.

"My dogs and sled are ready. I want to add a little more to the pack, then I'll come for you. Be ready within an hour," he told her.

DAVE walked briskly down the boardwalk leading to the porch of Jean's home. His eyes were alight as they stared at the small, compact house that held the girl. Was she home? His pulses leaped, and he felt the drumming of his heart.

A knock on the door, a long wait, and the door opened.

Jean stared incredulously, brushed her hand across her eyes, looked again. Wordless, Dave returned her gaze. Then he smiled, held out a hand.

"Won't you ask me to come in, Jean?" His voice broke the spell. This, then, was no dream; it was reality! It was Dave!

Her very lips grew white; she swayed. He sprang to her, kicked the door shut with his heel, caught her in his arms.

"Jean, darling! My sweetheart, it's Dave, don't you know it's Dave? Why do you look at me so strangely? Jean, you knew I'd come? It's taken me a long time, but at last I'm here, and now I can tell you about myself."

He held her close eagerly, hungrily. He lifted her white face and rained kisses on her eyelids, her cheeks, her lips, her soft throat.

At his touch, at the magic of his voice, his lips, the world receded for Jean. She remembered nothing save that Dave was here holding her fast in his arms, his heart throbbing against her own.

The sweetness of that moment, the mad, wild, sweet joy! She clung to him breathless, trembling.

"Let me hold you in my arms while I explain, my darling," he said, voice unsteady. "I'll begin at the beginning. I'm a police detective. I was sent on the biggest job they'd ever given me. If I succeeded it meant a good promotion for me, Jean; and I was eager, overeager. On the trail I met my man, the criminal I was after, but he was smarter than I. He overpowered me, shot my dogs, splintered my sled, got away. That was a terrible blow. My career would be ruined.

"When that blizzard came up, I got lost, and stumbled into the cabin where you found me. I was afraid to tell who I was; afraid you might inadvertently betray my identity to your Indian. Indians have been known to accept bribes for information, and I had to remain unknown.

"I know I was a suspicious-looking character, but you trusted me. I left as soon as I could; for I was eager to finish my job. I was on fire to win success, for I'm the youngest on the staff. Besides, success meant you, Jean. I have succeeded, and here I am, more worthy now to ask you to marry me."

Gradually as he talked the girl returned to the present and its events. Recollection came stabbingly. Marry him!

She wrenched herself from his arms, her face frozen into a mask of horror. Yet, wait! There was one more thing—the girl in the village, who had been the cause of her mad marriage.

"When Misca and I returned," she said swiftly, "we took the east trail. In the Wampus River settlement I was looking for you and I found the cabin you were in. I went to that cabin, and as I opened the door, intending to surprise you, I heard you talking with a girl you called Musette—"

"You were there?" Dave asked in astonishment. "Why under heaven didn't you come in then?"

"I heard you tell this girl that you had gone through hell to find her. I saw her throw herself into your arms."

Bewildered, he stared at her. Then he frowned thoughtfully.

"And you thought the words sounded like—still, perhaps they would. Had you heard further the explanation would have been simple. Oh, Jean, Jean, you thought—when you knew I loved you!" he reproached her tenderly. "Musette was the key. She could help me to find Sanders. And I was wild to complete my task quickly so I could come to you, Jean.

"Listen, darling. Musette belonged to Sanders. He treated her cruelly, kicked her out of town. And her love for him turned to hate. I knew this, and I knew she would be more posted about his movements than any other person. So I did 'go through hell,' trying to find her. And I succeeded, thank God!

"The fact that she threw her arms around me meant nothing. She was only looking for a new playmate. She's a flirtatious little thing, a half-breed, you know. Sanders had quit her cold, and she was hot for revenge, so she told me all she knew—enough to bring me here. Now you understand? My Jean, to imagine I could have thought of any other girl!"

"No. Don't touch me!" Jean cried as he stretched out a hand to draw her to him again. "My God, what have I done?"

THOROUGHLY startled now by her ghastly face, he regarded her.

"What do you mean, darling? You terrify me."

"I thought you didn't love me. I saw you with Musette—I misunderstood. And this morning I married John Farrel," she gasped.

Dave fell back a step. His hands clenched; his face became as white as was Jean's. In stony misery and horror they looked at each other.

Then he sprang to her, his hands on her shoulders; he shook her fiercely.

"Jean, Jean, it isn't true! It can't be true. Oh, darling, you are killing me." His voice rose like that of a man distraught.

"It's true. I married him this morning. He'll be here any minute. He's getting our pack together, and we are leaving Alaska. Mother and dad are with him."

She covered her face with her hands.

For a long moment Dave stared before him, his face ageing.

"I'll never let you go," he said.

"I must. I am his wife. Oh, Dave, how can I live?"

She paused as she heard steps on the porch. The door opened and her mother entered. Mrs. Newhouse, without a glance at Dave, rushed to Jean and took the girl into her arms.

"My poor child," she said, crying softly. "Such a terrible thing to happen to you! You are married to that man!"

Jean looked at her in bewilderment. How did her mother know about Dave?

"But it could be worse. We found him out in time—"

"Mother, what are you talking about?"

"I forgot you haven't heard. Oh, Jean, how can I tell—"

"Whatever it is, tell me quickly," the girl interrupted.

"John Farrel is a crook. He's from Seattle. They call him 'Polished Sanders.' He always works alone, no confederates. He met the president of the Alaska Bank while the man was visiting in Seattle, and became well acquainted with him. Said he was a mining man. Mr. Sidley invited him to come to Fairbanks, and later on Sanders did. And he robbed the bank!"

"Mother!" Jean's voice rose. "Dave! You said the man you were after was Sanders!"

Mrs. Newhouse for the first time observed Dave.

"Why, you are the man who arrested Sanders!" she exclaimed, staring at his white, grim face.

"I am," he responded.

"Jean," he went on, "tell your mother about us. Tell her why you listened to Sanders; tell her we love each other."

Unhesitatingly she turned to her mother and told the story, simply, clearly.

"I love no one but Dave, mother. I'll never love any other, though I am that villain's wife."

Dave's eyes were alight. Color had returned to his face. "You are no man's wife—yet. But you will be mine as soon as you will have me. Darling, I didn't know that Sanders and Farrel are the same man.

"Musette is his wife. I guess I didn't make that clear. They were legally married. They met when Sanders was on his way to Fairbanks, and a missionary at Keeosh village performed the ceremony. He grew tired of her before they reached Fairbanks and sent her back. But she followed him, and came to me with her marriage certificate, asking me to help her. That's how I came to know her.

"But Sanders kicked her out of Fairbanks. He was through. He's guilty of bigamy, too, but we won't press that charge. I got him and the sixty-five thousand he got away with, so—"

"Dave! You mean I'm not married to him?" It was a trembling, flushing, starry-eyed Jean who stared incredulously at him now.

"Well, not so as you could notice it," he declared, and his eyes were blue fire again.

"And you and I can be married?" the dazed girl asked.

"I'll tell the world!" Dave answered joyously.

They clung together, and did not even notice when Jean's mother noiselessly withdrew.

The Spun Glass Tulip

Suddenly he stooped, gathered her up and kissed the laughing mouth

She taunted him, gibed at him—and proposed to him, the beloved talkie idol of Hollywood! He planned punishment and gave—

By Jane Littell

GLENDORA FAGIN had one ambition—and that was to hold out against her uncle's wily schemes to marry her off until she found the one great love.

She had to be clever about it, too, for J. B.'s idea of a marriage for her was one that would rate first page newspaper mention.

J. B. had a lot of money that came to him rather suddenly when the fad for sylph-like feminine figures made Fagin's Famous Fat Remover a best seller. And J. B. had taken his millions, sold out his business, and retired to cultivate the approval of others as rich as he.

Hence his obsession for marrying Glendora to a man of his own selection. If J. B. Fagin's niece should marry any of the dozen or so men old J. B. was willing she should marry, it would—so he thought—take some of the stigma away from the Fagin name. Such a marriage would also serve as an entering wedge into society for J. B. and Mrs. J. B. Fagin.

J. B. was a sweet old lamb, Glendora

had long since decided, but he *was* new rich, and he never would get away from the stigma of "quack doctor," even though his famous fat remover had been made on a scientific medical formula.

He had informally adopted Glendora when she was about twelve, given her the most expensive of fashionable educations and informed her, when her schooling was finished, that there was just one way that she could repay him for his generosity: by marrying where he told her to marry. Preferably a title. J. B. had money enough to buy her a title.

So it was that Glendora had been dragged all over Europe, exposed to every marriageable title J. B. could find.

By the time she was twenty-one she knew exactly how to handle old J. B. She never opposed him, but somehow his schemes always fell through—which only made him the more determined that the next one should not fall through.

And then she saw one of Boyd Deming's films.

It was in Paris. And Boyd Deming was in Hollywood. But Boyd Deming, by some unbelievable kindness of the gods of love, was one person whom she knew she could fall in love with—and who would automatically receive the approval of old J. B. as a nephew-in-law.

Glendora sat through that picture twice, hardly able to get her breath below her pearls. Boyd Deming was just about unbelievable. He was the one man she had ever seen whom she wanted instantly—and Glendora usually got what she wanted.

She would! Red-haired, green-eyed girls usually do. And then, Glendora had had plenty of experience in evading the things she didn't want, which is perfectly good training to use in acquiring the things she did want.

Before she left that theater, Glendora had her campaign all planned out, and it worked so well that ten days later Mr. and Mrs. J. B. Fagin and their niece Glendora were reported by the society columns *en route* to America.

BOYD DEMING photographs like a million dollars. The picture public knows him as a tall, rather languid, ultra refined, extremely graceful person, with a gorgeous singing voice. A marvelous actor, is Boyd Deming. A person of consequence in the theater. One of the inner circle of the stage, whose name means almost as much as John Barrymore's.

It meant more to pudgy old J. B. Fagin, for Boyd was unmarried, and Boyd's name was always news. Newspaper mention was, to J. B., an accolade worth anything it cost. Even a journey halfway round the world.

It dawned upon J. B. suddenly in Paris that Boyd Deming would make a much better husband for Glendora than any of the titled gentlemen he had heretofore considered. Glendora saw to that!

That was how clever Glendora Fagin was. And old J. B. thought it was all his own idea.

Glendora protested all the way to Hollywood, and every voiced protest made J. B. the more grimly determined.

All J. B. really knew of Boyd Deming—all Glendora knew of him for that matter—was his name and his screen personality. And the Boyd Deming the cameras and the microphone recorded was very little like the real Boyd Deming.

Nobody who really knew him ever called him Boyd. "Spoofie" Deming he had been all his life. Spoofie Deming he always would be to his friends.

Off the screen there was little besides the way he wore his clothes and his extreme height to identify the real Boyd Deming with the characters he brought to life in the films. He was a long, lank individual, more comfortable in ungraceful poses than in graceful ones, much given to wise-cracking and practical jokes.

The heavy black rimmed spectacles he wore on his high bridged nose gave him a studious appearance. His careless love of comfort hid his grace. His great height and his tailor's artistry hid his muscular bulk both from the camera and the eyes of the world.

When he stepped before the cameras he became another person—the love dream of the nation's maidens come to life. There is not a man in Hollywood who can sing romantic rôles the way Boyd Deming can, nor one who can wear the laces and satins of a costume picture with such convincing ease.

YOU wouldn't, unless you had camera eyes, recognize the bespectacled person lounging over his coffee at a wall table in Henry's as the man who sang the lead in the picture you saw the evening before. It was no wonder that the three who were talking about him didn't.

They had just come from the theater down the street where the picture was being shown to enthusiastic audiences.

"—a man like Boyd Deming," were the first words that penetrated Spoofie's consciousness. Naturally he listened after that. "Not one cent of my money do you get unless you marry a man I approve of," J. B. added pompously.

"You've got too much money to cross, darling," Glendora smiled at him.

What if her great green eyes were shining with something new? J. B. couldn't read them. How could he know that she eyed each new arrival with pounding heart? Boyd Deming *might* come in. This was Hollywood's gathering place. Already she had seen Charlie Chaplin come in, and Jack Oakie. Their tables were surrounded by friends, two and three deep.

She wondered a little who was behind the crowd that hovered about the wall table where Spoofie sat. But when the crowd parted there was nothing familiar about the comfortably slouched, bespectacled figure. One glance told her that. She continued to watch the new arrivals hopefully, while the very man she was watching for watched her.

"I'd rather work for my living than marry any of the alleged gentlemen you've dug up for me," Spoofie heard her say in answer to some rumbling remark from J. B.

("'Atta girl!" he approved, wondering why his name had been brought into the conversation about marriage. He had never seen that trio before.)

"What are you always talking about work for?" complained J. B. irritably. "If you'd only act like a lady, maybe I could get you decently married off. And you won't get a cent of my money—"

"All right, all right," Glendora soothed him. "I'd even marry a spun glass tulip—like Boyd Deming—if that's the sort of nephew you prefer. Anything to keep you happy. I can stand him if you can. But me—I'd prefer a regular he-man, if he delivered groceries for a liv—"

"*Glendora!*" thundered J. B.

"Remember the old high blood pressure, Unc," warned the girl imprudently, with a twinkle of mirth just barely submerged beneath the indulgent expression in her green eyes.

Spoofie Deming had jerked suddenly upright at those words. A spun glass tulip! The little devil! And then he relaxed with a rueful little smile. He couldn't blame her much, after the laces and white wigs and beauty patches and knee breeches and exaggerated mannerisms of his screen self.

Still the words stung. A spun glass tulip! What the deuce did she mean by that?

There wasn't time for reflection. The girl was talking again, and he had to hear what she said.

"How are you going to catch him for me?" she was asking in a teasing little voice. "It's one thing to bid for a title—titles are for sale anyway—but a movie star probably has money enough of his own."

"My banker is attending to that," said J. B. pompously.

"Think he knows how to gather spun glass tulips?" teased the girl.

She must like that phrase, Spoofie thought indignantly. So did the rest of the restaurant. She wasn't making any effort to keep her voice down. Spoofie was sitting three tables away from her, and her voice carried to him perfectly. It probably carried to half the people in the restaurant. Spun glass tulip! Would he ever live that down?

Already his friends were wise to the situation. Conversations stopped. Amused smiles appeared. All eyes were on Glendora. Spoofie Deming would never hear the last of it. Spun glass tulip!

How could he ever have thought she was a cute monkey? She was a wise-cracking brat, that's what she was, he decided, his rage rising. A vulgar one, at that, or she wouldn't be discussing her matrimonial aspirations at the top of her voice in a public restaurant.

Well, he hoped she did make a try for him. He remembered with sudden sympathy the remark credited to a young cabaret dancer recently of Hollywood, who had been pursued in season and out of season by a rich woman tourist. "I very hard boy to make," the young Argentine had protested.

And how hard Spoofie Deming would be to make! Boy! He would make Glendora—whoever she was—as ridiculous as she was making him.

Spun glass tulip! Zowie! How that stung!

IT stung worse the next day when delivery boys arrived at the studio with packages that contained just what he feared they contained: glass tulips! Tulips made of spun candy that looked like glass. Pots of tulips from Hollywood florists.

Tulip Deming he became. Spoofie Deming had played too many practical jokes on Hollywood to have a chance like this overlooked.

It *was* funny. Even Spoofie had to admit it was funny, but his smile was a little one-sided and quite, quite rueful when he made that admission.

He lost a lot of sleep over it. He stayed awake nights and fretted irritably during the days, trying to think up a way to get even with Glendora for hanging a name like that onto him. The best plan he could think of was to make her fall in love with him, wangle the situation around until she proposed to him—or said something he could construe as a proposal—and then tell her that a spun glass tulip would make a very poor husband. Too

fragile. Too delicate for her cave-woman tactics.

He *had* to find a way to let her know he had overheard her disagreeable remark. His pride demanded that. But how?

For days and days on end he expected her to turn up at the studio, at the restaurants, at parties. But there was no sign of her. It irked him dreadfully.

He didn't know her last name or he would have started a search for her. Glendora. But Glendora what?

He had to find her. She filled his thoughts and disturbed his dreams. Glendora. Glendora. Red-headed Glendora with great, luminous green eyes . . .

And he thought it was revenge he was looking for.

Glendora was searching for Boyd Deming, too. But by some prank of fate, if the Fagins went to the Montmartre for dinner, Boyd was next door at the Embassy Club. If Boyd went to the Blossom Room, the Fagins had chosen the Brown Derby.

But even if she could not find the man who typified perfection to her, Glendora Fagin was happy. She was in the same town with him, anyway, and sooner or later she would find him. Not only was she in the same town with him, but J. B. was more than usually determined that this time Glendora should marry the man he had selected. And this time Glendora was just as determined as he was—and that really meant that Boyd hadn't a chance to escape.

IT was three weeks after the incident at Henry's that Spoofie Deming, in full make-up—grease paint, court plaster patches, laces, knee breeches and diamante shoe buckles—left the set for the studio restaurant. Nobody had called him "Tulip" all morning, and for the first time in days he had managed to rid his mind of Glendora.

But the studio crowd made up for their neglect when he entered the restaurant.

"Hi, Tulip!"

And then somebody began to sing "My Dresden China Rose," the theme song for the picture being made.

"Hey, Tulip, I'd avoid the executive's dining room if I were you," called somebody else.

"The horticulturist lady will get you, Tulip—if you don't watch out."

The rippling wave of laughter that followed him down the length of the long room made Spoofie's ears burn. His hands, hidden by the lace ruffles of his flesh colored satin coat, were clenched into dangerous looking fists. His teeth were set—clenched until they grated. His eyes were narrowed into slits.

And still, he couldn't blame the gang. He had pulled fast ones on every one of them, and they were just getting even. Still, he was sure his jokes never made any of them as uncomfortable as their teasing made him.

Didn't they realize that this thing was threatening his entire career? If one of the movie columnists or the fan magazine writers called him a spun glass tulip in print he was ruined. The nation at large wouldn't comprehend the Hollywood jokes.

In moviedom such light hearted kidding didn't matter so much, but Spoofie couldn't forget that a newspaper editor who had called Valentino a pink powder puff had almost ruined him. It didn't matter that Valentino was anything but a pink powder puff—nor would it matter that Spoofie Deming was anything but a spun—

And then he turned into the big alcove that is known as the executive's dining room—and met Glendora's big, expectant eyes.

A stone wall couldn't have stopped him more abruptly. Nor could Glendora have done anything more calculated to blow his smoldering rage into flame.

"Oh, Mr. Deming!" she cried. And she didn't mean to, the words just burst out. "You're a million times more beautiful in war paint than you are on the screen!"

The titter that ran around the dining room finally burst into a great guffaw of mirth. There wasn't anything for Spoofie to do but what he did. He laid his hand over his heart, bowed deeply, sarcastically, and turned to leave the room. Confound the girl!

But he wasn't to get away. With the Fagins was the pudgy little producer, Sam Schmitz, president and majority stockholder of Five Arts Films. The one man on the whole mile-square lot to whom no one ever said "no."

"Oh, Boyd!" called Mr. Schmitz. "We are waiting for you. You will join us, please. And meet three of your fans: Mrs. Fagin—and Mr. Fagin—and Miss Fagin—"

"Fans?" repeated Spoofie in a choked sort of voice. "Have they all a taste for—spun glass tulips?"

The whole dining room listened for the answer. Listened and listened, for a blank silence held at the table where Spoofie stood.

Consternation spread itself over Glendora's face. J. B. looked as if he would burst with rage. Sam Schmitz didn't know what it was all about. He hadn't heard about the incident in Henry's. And no one spoke a word for an eternally long moment.

How long the silence would have held—for Spoofie intended to have an answer—nobody can tell now. For in the vibrant, waiting moment came a boy from the dressing rooms. And he was carrying a huge pot of tulips directly to the table where the three Fagins sat with Sam Schmitz.

That electric silence was broken instantly by a laugh.

Spoofie pulled out the chair beside the embarrassed, heartbroken girl and sat down. Her world of dreams was in chaos about her, and Spoofie didn't give her a chance to bring any sort of order out of the chaos.

"Tell me, please, Miss Fagin, what you mean by a spun glass tulip. And why you hung a title like that onto me. You have given me some very uncomfortable moments, if it gives you any satisfaction to know that."

Glendora sighed. The one man in the world. The one man she could love. The only man she and J. B. had agreed upon for a husband—and this had to happen!

"I think you owe me some sort of an explanation," Spoofie insisted, his eyes hard with determination.

Glendora swallowed hard. There were tears to swallow, and an awful, immovable lump in her throat that just about made words impossible. Besides, it seemed to her that all the eyes in the world were staring at her.

"Well?" he insisted cruelly.

"Why—" she managed. "You were so—sort of—sort of—like one of those Dresden china figures—"

"Humph!" snorted Spoofie.

"I mean—" she stammered, knowing perfectly well that she was making matters worse with every word she said. "I mean— Oh, if you will take me some place where the whole world won't listen, I can tell you—"

"Will you excuse us for a few moments, Mr. Schmitz?" said Boyd promptly, getting to his feet. "Miss Fagin and I have something to discuss."

AND then, white-wigged head high, Spoofie Deming offered the trembling girl his arm and led her out of the executive's dining room, down the full length of the block long cafeteria, past the jeering eyes, the lips that managed to restrain their kidding, out onto the lot, and into his own dressing room.

"Now," he said grimly, "this place is completely private. And before you start to explain, my girl, let me tell you that if the fans of the nation got wise to the tag you've pinned on me I'd be laughed off the screen. So, you see, it's going to take not only some explaining, but a vast amount of undoing. Well—let's go."

What could she say to him? There was only one explanation, and if she gave him that what chance would her love have? That sure intuition that they were intended for each other was stronger now that she had seen him in person and spoken to him than it had been that day in the Paris theater, when the picture and the reproduction of his moving voice had robbed her of breath. She couldn't lose him! She couldn't!

Only the truth would serve her. And the truth was a desperate gamble.

"Well?" he barked.

Glendora took a long breath and began.

"Ever hear of Fagin's Famous Fat Remover? Well, my uncle invented it—"

"What's that got to do with spun glass tulips?"

"Everything," she went on, gathering some shreds of confidence as she talked. "It gives my uncle an inferiority complex. He's got gobs of money—but no social position—"

"Tulips! Tulips!" Spoofie snarled at her.

"Oh, I'm telling you!" she cried imploringly. "He's got an obsession. It's marrying me to somebody—like you—"

"I see," said Spoofie grimly. "He'd have the newspaper account of the wedding all larded with his fat reducer. Well, not my wedding—"

"Please!" she begged. "He insists that I marry a gentleman—"

"And you'd prefer a he-man grocery wagon driver. Oh, I heard you that night in Henry's! You shouldn't yell so—"

"I don't blame you for hating me, then," she said humbly. "But, you see—I saw that film of yours in Paris—and you were so beautiful—"

"Like a spun glass tulip," he gritted out between his teeth.

"That was just what you reminded me of," she told him with brave sweetness. "So tall and so graceful, and so—sort of fragile looking in your silks and laces— Oh, what are you doing?" she cried aghast, for Spoofie had gone into a flurry of activity. He was stripping off the flesh colored satin coat, ripping off the beruffled silk shirt with small regard for the buttons that flew in all directions.

"I'm just showing you how fragile I am," he said grimly, standing before her in silk undershirt and satin knee breeches, his sun-browned skin rippling with muscles that moved even as he breathed. "Now, do I look so much like a spun glass tulip?"

It was too much for Glendora's bubbling humor. She sank back in her chair and howled with mirth. It was

too funny! The immaculate, dandified Boyd Deming, stripping off his satin coat and ruffled shirt in a rage, to display his muscular shoulders and arms.

She laughed and laughed. She laughed because she was so happy to be talking to Boyd Deming. She laughed because Boyd, standing over her, fists clenched, eyes narrowed, brawny arms and shoulders bared, was such a ridiculous contrast to the silks and satins he had just stripped off—and finally she was laughing because she couldn't stop. Hysterically.

"And if anybody says 'tulips' I'll kill him!"

"Stop it!" commanded the man.

But she couldn't stop. The tears were rolling down her cheeks, but peal after peal of hysterical mirth rang through the dressing room building.

AND then Boyd Deming stooped and took hold of her arms. He lifted her from her chair and shook her. Still she laughed.

He stared down at her in indecision for a moment, and then he gathered her into his arms and kissed the laughing mouth. That stopped the laughter.

"Oh, nice!" said Glendora Fagin. "Do it again."

"You—little imp of perversity!" growled Spoofie Deming, dropping her unceremoniously into her chair again.

"You like me—eh?" said Glendora, giggling again.

"No, I don't like you," snorted Spoofie. "I think you're a pest. But I've got to put up with you until we kill this tulip story. *And you've got to help me kill it.*"

"Of course," said Glendora, suddenly sober. "I'm dreadfully sorry. You see, J. B. picked you for my husband, and I couldn't think of marrying a conceited picture actor—"

"What?" roared Spoofie.

"Well, I couldn't, could I?" asked Glendora innocently.

"Why couldn't you?"

"Well—I don't care much for—spun glass tulips—"

"I'm no spun glass tulip!" shouted Spoofie.

"But — you see — you *look* like one—"

"I'll show you—"

"You've shown me!" protested Glendora, sidling for the door, but keeping a wary eye out to be sure he would stop her.

He did. He bounded to the door, turned the key in the lock, and put that key down the waistband of his satin knee breeches.

"Now," said Spoofie grimly, "we're going to thrash this out. I'll never do another costume picture if I never work before the camera again. Spun glass tulip!" he snorted.

"Oh, but listen!" protested Glendora, realizing at last something of the enormity of what she had done. "Everybody loves you in wigs and laces—"

"Yeah," drawled Spoofie. "Everybody laughs at me—"

"Oh, no, they don't," Glendora assured him. "Why, I was so crazy about you that I tricked my uncle to leave Paris and come all the way to Hollywood—"

"So you could marry a conceited picture actor!" said Spoofie sarcastically.

"Exactly," said Glendora.

"Oh, my Lord! You'll drive me crazy!" groaned Spoofie.

"No, I won't," said Glendora very sweetly. "I'll make you very happy, when you understand—"

"Stow the nonsense," commanded Spoofie. "And let's get down to business. How are we going to stop that tulip story? That's what I want to know. You'll have to help me stop it."

"You might marry me—" began Glendora, pursing her lips, and turning her green eyes up at him speculatively.

"I ought to, you little devil!" snarled Spoofie. "It would serve you jolly well right. And would I lead you a dance? You'd be sorry you ever left Paris."

Glendora stared at him for a moment before she answered. "I'll take a chance—if you will," she said.

This was exactly the situation Spoofie Deming had dreamed of bringing about!

But he didn't meet it as he planned. He didn't tell her that a spun glass tulip was too fragile for matrimony. He said, instead:

"I will, you little devil! And will you be sorry? Boy!"

Into that moment came a loud knocking.

"Come in!" called Spoofie.

The door knob turned and turned ineffectually.

"It's locked," came a muffled voice.

Spoofie strode over to it and yanked, but the door never moved.

"It really is locked," said Glendora sweetly, but with suspiciously gleaming eyes. "If my guess is right, the key is somewhere near the left knee of your beautiful satin pants."

"Breeches!" snapped Spoofie.

"Yes, sir," said Glendora. "Breeches."

The boy at the door bore a message from the director, calling Spoofie to the set.

"You made me miss my lunch!" he glowered at Glendora.

"I'll bring you a sandwich, darling," she told him sweetly.

"Grr-r-r!" said Spoofie.

THE boy guided Glendora back to the dining room, where she ate her lunch quite leisurely—and very blissfully, even though she did burst into giggles intermittently.

"I'm engaged to Boyd Deming," she announced placidly, when she sat down.

"Wha-at?" gasped J. B., Mrs. J. B. and Sam Schmitz in unison.

"Yes, lady and gentlemen," announced Glendora mischievously, "it was a case of love at first sight. I proposed to him—and he accepted me—"

"Wha-a-at?"

"And he asked me to bring a sandwich and come over to the set and watch him work this afternoon," she added.

"Wha-a-t?" This time it was not a chorus. It was only Sam Schmitz who spoke. Spoofie Deming wouldn't work if there were visitors on the set.

"Yes, he did," said Glendora. "Do you know what kind of sandwiches he prefers?" And so it happened that history was made that afternoon.

Glendora Fagin carried three big sandwiches to the Boyd Deming set with her own two hands, and presented them to the annoyed man—and stayed there all afternoon listening and watching. And Spoofie Deming permitted it!

And afterward they greeted the newspaper reporters in Spoofie's dressing room, and gave out the announcement of the engagement.

"And if one of you mentions the words spun glass tulips," Spoofie announced, "I'll kill him with my bare hands. I mean it!"

And then Glendora dragged him to their hotel for dinner, and let J. B. and Mrs. J. B. think it was an honest-to-goodness, bona fide engagement. It was. Spoofie Deming was the only one who didn't realize that.

He started out that evening by being very gruff and dignified. At Glendora's suggestion, the Fagins had dinner served in their own suite. But J. B. was so very respectful, so obviously awed, so unable to hide his delight, that Spoofie saw the funny side of the situation, and before very long he and Glendora were smiling in unison. J. B. thought they were happy.

"I didn't think there was a girl in the world with the sense of humor you've got," Spoofie told Glendora over the dinner table.

"I was made for you, darling," cooed Glendora.

That evening set the tone of their engagement. When the morning papers came out at midnight the Fagin telephone began to ring. The calls were all for Spoofie. And by that time he either didn't know what he was talking about or he didn't care.

"Yes, it's true," he chortled into the telephone. "I'm marrying into the Fagin family. My fat reducer won't cost me a cent. I'll never have to worry about exercise and diet again. . . .

"Yes—love at first sight. The gal's a go-getter. An Amazon. A cave woman. She ran me into my dressing room, locked the door and swallowed the key—and wouldn't let me out until they broke down the door and I promised to marry her. . . . All true. I swear it."

Spoofie Deming thought he was having his own little joke. He thought he was punishing Glendora. But Hollywood knew Spoofie Deming better than he realized. Everybody thought

he was slightly off his head with happiness. Everybody laughed at every outrageous thing he said—and went right on congratulating him. And pretty soon his engagement began to seem quite right and proper to Spoofie.

He kept the Fagin suite filled with tulips.

"Your favorite flower," he told Glendora solemnly.

And he bought her the most outrageous diamond for an engagement ring. It was the largest one he could find in all Los Angeles. But he didn't put it on her finger himself. He sent it, and its white and gold box, with a bale of tulips. And he thought he was being funny.

He got her a permanent pass to the Five Arts lot, and he wouldn't work unless she was on the set. He thought he was punishing her by keeping her on that hot, close set all hours of the day and night.

They were shooting the last sequences of "The Dresden China Rose," working from nine in the morning until midnight or later every night, rushing it through as they always rush the last scenes. Never had Spoofie Deming been so tireless. Never had he sung so well or photographed so gorgeously. And he didn't know why.

GLENDORA did. It was no punishment for her to arrive at the Boyd Deming set at nine in the morning and sit there all day, watching, listening, kidding with Boyd when he had time for her, strolling to the restaurant for meals, strolling back to his dressing room with him while he freshened his make-up. She adored every moment of it.

She adored Spoofie more every minute, and told him so. Especially when others were listening. When she made love to him before others he beamed down at her and murmured:

"You perfect creature! You really are priceless, you know."

And when she said sweet things to him in private, he said merely, "Ye-ah?"

And then suddenly Glendora got tired of the game. Boyd loved her—and he didn't realize it. It was time to make him realize it.

She wanted him to kiss her because he wanted to kiss her—not because he thought he was punishing her. She wanted to kiss him back, not just hold her lips passive beneath his. She wanted him to put that outrageously big diamond solitaire on her finger with the sweet words every lover says when he gives his adored one the most precious jewel she ever receives. It really didn't mean anything until he did—even if it had cost such a fearful amount of money.

She wanted to marry him—right away. She wanted to belong to him. She wanted him to realize the wonderful love that had come to them.

She waited quite a while for Spoofie to discover it for himself—waited in fact until the night the last retakes had been shot and the director had dismissed the company—and then she said, as they were driving home in the moonlight:

"Well, thank goodness that's over!"

As if it were a great relief, and with perfect faith in her ability to bring Spoofie Deming to her own terms by the same methods that worked so well on J. B.

"The picture?" asked Spoofie.

"No," said Glendora, watching him closely. "I mean—our private, particular farce."

"Meaning which?" asked Spoofie, showing his surprise.

"The pseudo engagement, of course, silly," said Glendora. "Nobody has called you a spun glass tulip for a long time, have they?"

"No-o," admitted Spoofie slowly.

"Well, then," said Glendora briskly, trying to peek around Spoofie's turned up collar and read his face, "I want to get back to Paris—and husband hunting."

"I thought J. B. wanted you to marry me," said Spoofie gruffly.

"Oh, I guess he's had enough publicity out of the engagement to satisfy even him," she said in a carefully careless tone. "Anyway, there'll be a lot more about breaking it. Here's your ring," she finished, stripping it off and putting it into his hand.

And then she got the surprise of her life, for Spoofie closed his fingers over it and calmly stuck it into his vest pocket!

And she had been sure he loved her!

She was so surprised that her pink mouth flew open—and stayed open until Spoofie, with a quick glance in her direction, remarked with true Spoofie amusement:

"Don't expose the tonsils to the night air, sister. They aren't used to it."

"I hate you!" cried Glendora furiously, so blinded by the sudden tears that she didn't see that Spoofie took a strange turn in the road and turned the car south.

"I don't know what ever made me think I was in love with you!" she went on. "I hate you! Hate you! Hate you!"

And she stamped her frivolous heels on the floor boards until it sounded like a roll of drums.

"Yeah?" drawled Spoofie, unbelieving, but managing to sound rather bored and uninterested in spite of the delighted laughter he was controlling.

"Ye-ye-ess, I d-do!" gulped Glendora, through her tears.

She had been so sure that Spoofie loved her! And he didn't! He didn't! Oh, if she had only gone on holding him to the engagement he would have learned to love her. She was sure of that. He was so happy when he was with her. And his eyes told her that he loved her. They did!

AND now she was making a perfect fool of herself, crying over a broken engagement when she had broken it herself. Whereupon she cried the harder. And Spoofie didn't say a word. He just drove on and on through the moonlight. On and on!

There wasn't anything for Glendora to say, either. She had said it all—and Spoofie had accepted it. Oh, so calmly! Too calmly. And she had been so sure that all it would take to make him realize that he really did love her was the threat of losing her.

What could she do? Was there any way to show him that she didn't mean it? Wasn't there any way to get that precious diamond back on her slender finger? Wasn't there any way to make Spoofie put it there with the tender words she had been waiting so long to hear? Wasn't there any way to make him stop kidding? Oh, if he would only be serious and tender with her! If he would only make the slightest gesture in her direction, she would fling herself into his arms and explain.

But he didn't make any gesture at all. He merely drove on and on through the moonlight.

And then he began to sing! Sing! The theme song from the picture he had just finished—the story of a dis-

illusioned man who fell in love with a little porcelain figure and loved her so devotedly that she came to life for him every evening. It seemed like an insult to Glendora as he sang it.

"My Dresden china rose—
The girl nobody knows,
Who comes to life for me
From midnight until three—
And then she goes to sleep
In immobility deep.
A porcelain figure she
Who only lives for me.

"O-oh—my Dresden china rose
On my mantel does repose;
No love-spells can she cast
At men who saunter past.
No trifling can she do,
None other can she woo.
A porcelain figure she—
Completely true to me."

There was a moment's silence, and then Spoofie said:

"I sure would appreciate a girl like that. A fellow might know where he stood—"

And then, while Glendora waited breathlessly for him to go on, he began to sing the chorus.

So that was all he cared! He was glad—glad—it was over. And she just—couldn't—live without Spoofie Deming!

The slow, uncontrollable tears wet her cheeks and she let them trickle down into her collar. She wouldn't give Spoofie the satisfaction of seeing her wipe them away. But she couldn't bear to have him sing any more. He had told her he never could sing unless he was happy—

"What's the matter with the city lights?" she asked, seizing upon any subject that would demand a reply. He couldn't talk and sing at the same time. "We ought to be close enough to the city to see the lights."

"We're not headed toward the city," replied Spoofie—at the end of another verse.

"Why not?" she asked in surprise.

"Well," announced Spoofie, ducking his face into his turned-up collar to hide a smile, "for one reason, it's a gorgeous night. For another, I'm not sleepy. And for a third, since this is my last drive with Miss Glendora Fagin, I wanted to prolong it."

"Oh!" she whispered heartbrokenly. "Oh! Oh!"

AND then, far down the road, their powerful headlights picked up a glimmer of white.

"Oh, oh!" mimicked Spoofie carelessly. "Customs and immigration men searching cars. Well, I guess we stop."

Spoofie stopped—but he had killed his engine before he noticed that the big white sheet across the road did *not* bear the familiar huge black letters, "U. S. Customs. Stop!"

"It's a holdup!" he managed to whisper to Glendora.

"Oh, my ring! My gorgeous ring!" she whispered back, agonized.

Spoofie had just one moment to grin down at her before two masked men stuck wicked-looking revolvers into his face.

"But you didn't want it," he said.

"Oh, I did! I do!" cried Glendora, flinging herself upon him and burying her face against his shoulder. It was quite a natural thing to do. Where is there a girl who could look unconcernedly into the barrel of a gun?

"Stick 'em up!" came a menacing voice.

Spoofie did. There was nothing else to do.

"Move over, lady," ordered the men. She did. There was nothing else to do.

Swiftly, methodically, they went

through Spoofie's pockets. Watch, chain, wallet—everything of value was transferred to their own pockets. Then one of them held them at the point of his revolver while the other drained their gasoline tank of most of its contents.

"All right," the holdup man announced at last. "Get rolling. You won't go far."

Spoofie shrugged—and got going. But he had lost his debonair air. He sat slumped dejectedly over the wheel.

"You were right," he burst out finally. "I *am* a spun glass tulip—or something equally ineffectual. Imagine submitting helplessly to a couple of yeggs! If you hadn't broken the engagement already you'd have plenty of cause to do it after this. A fine protector I am!"

Something clicked suspiciously against Glendora's teeth before she answered, and there was a notable bulge in one smooth cheek.

"What could you do?" she defended him in a muffled sort of voice. "They had guns—"

"Well—I needn't have been so damned trusting. I needn't have killed the engine, then we could have got away—"

"They'd have shot at us—"

"Oh, good Lord!" interrupted Spoofie, for there came a sputtering from the engine and the car rolled to a stop. "Now we are in for it!"

"Why?" demanded Glendora.

"We're on the shore road halfway to San Diego and out of gas. And here we'll sit till morning, probably. And then what will your uncle say? You—out all night with me. He'll make you marry me then, Glendora," said Spoofie.

Glendora—in spite of the surge of joy that shot through her—took time to analyze his tone. There was something new in it. It was rueful—and still it was triumphant. But, above all, it was serious.

Spoofie had stopped kidding at last! And that was worth anything! But how should she meet the situation? Should she get serious too? Or should she go on kidding until he begged her to be serious? Opposition always worked with J. B. It had failed once with Spoofie, but maybe it would work again this time.

"IT looks to me," she said with mock severity, "as if we'd have been out most of the night anyway, since we're halfway to San Diego and it's three o'clock."

"But don't you see? It wouldn't have mattered so much as long as we were engaged. But this— You don't want to marry me, and it looks as though you'd have to. I'm dreadfully sorry, Glendora," he went on softly. "I guess you'll have to go on being engaged to me for a while. I'll get you a new ring in the morning—and maybe we can kid J. B. out of marching us to the altar just ahead of a shotgun. If we can't—well, we'll just have to make the best of it. And if we should make a go of it—the marriage, I mean—this night will be good for a laugh some day."

"Don't you—think—we could—make a go of marriage?" asked Glendora, starry-eyed.

"What do you think I was beating it for San Diego for?" asked Spoofie gruffly.

"I don't know," said Glendora, trying to subdue that clicking sound. "Why were you?"

"I was going to stand you up before the mayor of Tia Juana or some other official and see if I couldn't rush you

into marriage before you could get your breath. That's how big a fool I am—"

"Darling! Truly?" began Glendora—and then she choked. She bent over, coughing. She coughed and coughed—and finally she put her hand over her mouth and stopped.

"What is it? What made you do that? What's the matter?" demanded Spoofie anxiously.

Glendora merely extended the clenched hand.

On the opened palm lay—her ring! Her gorgeous, beloved ring!

Spoofie looked—and laughed. Just lay back in his seat and laughed and laughed and laughed. And then he seized her in his arms and tried to kiss her—but laughter does so interfere with kisses, and they were laughing together.

"Shut up—and kiss me!" ordered Spoofie finally. And she did. And at last—

"Where is that ring?" asked Spoofie softly. "Will you wear it again, honey? Oh, darling! I love you so! Don't you care enough to go on being engaged to me? Don't you think—maybe—if I tried very hard I could make you love me?" pleaded Spoofie. "Won't you wear your ring again? Darling!"

Glendora put her head on one side with mock thoughtfulness and regarded him out of twinkling eyes. But it wasn't light enough for him to see the twinkle.

"Well," she said slowly, "if you actually proposed to me—and if you actually put the ring on my finger yourself—"

"Darling!" he cried. "I have proposed to you! I want to marry you—right away. To-morrow—I mean to-day! I just adore you—you red-headed imp of mischief! I can't live without you! You stop teasing me, you hear?"

Glendora laughed a little. She couldn't help it. She was so happy—and then she held up her mouth to be kissed—and her finger for the ring at the same time. And Spoofie managed to do two things at once very effectually.

But they didn't get very far with the explanations. There were too many kisses to exchange, too many ways of saying "I love you" to be discovered—and the next thing they knew the sun was coming up!

"You look," said Glendora, lifting her head from his shoulder, "as if you'd been ducked in a dish of cranberries."

Spoofie twisted the rear view mirror around to get a view of himself.

"Good heavens! You'll have to use indelible lip stick! I can't go around with signs of war all over my face!"

And she did wear indelible lip stick after that. Spoofie bought her one in Tia Juana—right after the wedding—

"Your trousseau," he told her gravely, putting it into her hand.

"Not on your life," said his wife seriously. "I want a chinchilla coat as beautiful as Lilyan Tashman's and—"

Spoofie put his hand to his head in mock distress.

"Gold digger!" he accused her.

"Spun glass tulip!" she retorted with twitching mouth.

"You win! Have a couple of chinchilla coats!"

And they have been laughing at each other ever since—but they do have their serious moments. Usually when Glendora's arms are about her husband's neck—

The sentences danced before Agatha's eyes. It couldn't be possible!

Her Bartered Beauty

Her hated husband murdered; Ronnie, her lover, in peril; herself an object of scorn—Mittie's darkest hour was upon her

By Beulah Poynter

Author of "Cinderella on Broadway," etc.

CHAPTER XII

AGATHA LEARNS OF THE MURDER

A COPY of the Roan City *News* was delivered each morning to every guest at the Summit House, being tucked under the door or laid on the breakfast tray.

Agatha Druce, who had lain awake until the small hours, hoping that Ronald would stop in to say good night or telephone her before retiring, did not waken early. When her breakfast tray arrived, the newspaper rested beside the coffeepot. Ordinarily she did not glance at the sheet, but this morning

a strange look in the waiter's eyes, and a hesitancy about his manner before he left the room, made her pick it up. Its glaring headlines were like a blow in the face.

"Prominent citizen murdered," she read. "Leonard Lalock shot in his library shortly after his wedding to Mittie Blaine—lover of girl under arrest—Ronald Standish, wealthy New Yorker, believed to be implicated in crime—young wife held on suspicion."

The sentences danced before Agatha's eyes. Ronald under arrest? It couldn't be possible! There was some horrible mistake!

The paper dropped from her nerveless fingers. Mittie married to Lalock and Lalock murdered! Ronald — oh, God, what had she done? Ronald couldn't have done such a thing! Her practical joke couldn't have had such a terrible aftermath!

She caught up the paper again and read the full account. There was damnably convincing evidence — Mittie's marriage to Lalock, Ronald's quarrel with the banker, Lalock's death, and the revolver in Ronald's hands.

Ronald was very ill, it seemed—a severe case of grippe—and the inquest had been postponed because of his sickness. He was in jail, having been arrested for murder. It was Agatha who had introduced him to Mittie. *She* was to blame for this!

Oh, she must go to him at once!

Did Cecily Howard know of it? No time to telephone her now. Poor Cecily, what a blow to her, too—her *fiancé* in a sordid quarrel over another woman, and arrested for the murder of that woman's husband!

Her hands shaking, her teeth chattering, Agatha dragged on her clothing. The telephone rang. Armitage was on the wire. Oh, God, wouldn't he laugh? He would know all the truth now.

"Agatha, I'm coming up to see you," he told her, and rang off.

She braced herself against his entrance, his derision. To face him now—it was too much to endure!

When he came in he took her hands and led her to the sofa. There was deep compassion in his dark eyes.

"I see you already have read about it," he said, noticing the newspaper. "I had hoped to break the news more gently."

"Oh, Hal, Hal!" she cried, bursting into tears and covering her face with her hands.

"There, there," he said, patting her shoulder. "Keep a hold on yourself, dear. There's some mistake. Ronald never committed a murder."

"Of course not! Ronnie wouldn't kill anything. I mustn't sit here—I must go to him!"

She started to rise, but Armitage pushed her back gently.

"Wait a minute. You're in no condition to go anywhere yet. Let's talk this over calmly first. You'll need a lawyer, and a good one."

"Yes."

"I've wired to New York for one."

She looked at him, too stunned to grasp what he was saying.

"Grant Bradley is as clever as they come. If he can take the case, he'll be here to-morrow."

"But we can't wait until to-morrow to get Ronnie out of that jail! He's ill, the papers say."

"There is no bail for murder," Armitage told her softly. "I phoned down this morning as soon as I heard of it. Nothing can be done until after the inquest. There may not be an indictment. I hope not, but it's wisest

to have Bradley here in case one is brought against Ronald. These country yokels have it in for city folks, and the sheriff is convinced that your brother is guilty."

Agatha shuddered.

"You're very kind," she said.

"I wouldn't be much of a friend if I didn't try to help now. I hope you realize I *am* your friend, Agatha."

Her friend—and it was to strike at him that she had planned her disastrous scheme and plunged her brother into the midst of this shocking tragedy!

"But tell me, how does Ronald come to be mixed up in this? I thought he was engaged to Cecily Howard."

"He is."

"Then where does this Mrs. Lalock come in?"

"He's—he's in love with her."

"That's bad! Do you know her?"

"Yes. She's—oh, it's all my fault, Hal! I introduced them. It started—"

How could she confess it to him? How could she tell him who the girl really was?

Incoherently, between choking sobs, she laid bare the whole story — who Mittie was, why she had brought the squatter girl to the hotel, and how Ronald had declared that he would marry her. The man listened, his expression changing very little.

"I see!" he murmured. "I see! It's a pretty mess, isn't it? And your part in it isn't enviable. The girl was attractive, very, but I doubt if I'd have asked her to marry me. I'm not altogether a fool, and she's a little too young for my taste."

"You despise me," Agatha moaned.

He laughed.

"No, but I'm a little surprised. I shouldn't be, I suppose. I confess that I wasn't quite fair to you. The trouble was that I cared a little too much for you, and that affection didn't fit in very well with my plans for the future. If I hadn't cared, I wouldn't have been so brutal. I was being hard on myself, as well as on you. No, I'm not exactly in a position to despise you, am I? Sort of the pot calling the kettle black, if I did."

"You won't hold what I did against Ronnie, will you?" she pleaded, touching Hal's hand timidly.

"Good Lord, no! But it's certainly unfortunate that the girl's antecedents are what they are. That will hurt him as well as her. It will all be dug up and used against her. Gad, if you had succeeded in your revenge on me it would have been a glorious one for you!"

"Don't!" she sobbed.

"What a rotter you must have thought me, to have attempted such a thing! I wonder—" He walked the length of the room and back. "I wonder if it is wrong for a man to be too ambitious—to wait for a woman who can help him attain his ambition! I'd always fancied myself a gentleman. Maybe I'm not—but never mind, we can't talk of that now. We've got to see what we can do for Ronald."

"Oh, Hal, I'm so ashamed! You're big to forgive me, to help me, after this!"

"No! You've shown me just how little I am. I would call your brother big. I feel pretty small just now." He frowned. "You want to go to him, you say?"

"Yes."

"I'll go with you."

RONALD was too groggy with fever to be conscious of his surroundings—of the dank, gray stone walls, the barred window and

door, the musty smell of dark, unsunned corridors. He lay asleep on the iron cot, covered with a red blanket, when Agatha and Armitage were ushered into his cell by the sheriff. His eyes did not open.

"Dr. Wren gave him a powder," Gayner said. "I guess it had some dope in it, for he went right to sleep and hasn't woke once."

"Oh, this is awful!" Agatha whispered. She shivered and clung tightly to her companion's arm. "This is a horrible place!"

"Not exactly a lady's boudoir," grinned the sheriff; "but folks ain't put in boudoirs for committin' murder."

"My brother never committed a murder," Agatha retorted hotly. "In a city they would never have arrested him on such evidence."

Gayner pulled at his mustache.

"Maybe not. Hit's what you'd call circumstantial, but it's evidence enough for us to fetch him here. If he didn't kill Mr. Lalock, I'm plumb sure he knows who did."

"You don't think the girl did it?" Agatha gasped.

She glanced down at Ronald's flushed face pressed against the hard pillow, his thick waves of hair dishevelled like a small boy's. It would be like him to try to protect Mittie if she had done it.

"I don't think anything for certain sure," said Gayner. "I only know Mittie Blaine is old Asa Blaine's granddarter, and he's no 'count. Blood will tell, they say. She ain't had any proper raisin' from Asa. If she was in love with this here brother of yours, and he was in love with her, there ain't no tellin' what a girl with bad blood will do. Folks around here don't sympathize much with married women lovin' other fellers, or other fellers tryin' to take wives away from their lawful husbands."

"She wasn't married when my brother fell in love with her," Agatha flared. "There isn't a finer, more honorable man in the world than Ronald Standish."

"I dunno anything about that. All I know is what he told me—they loved each other, and he come to find out why she married Len Lalock 'stead of him. Mis' Button seen him with the gun, and I seen him with the body."

"Don't antagonize him, Agatha," Armitage whispered to her. "It won't do Ronald any good if you do, and may harm him a great deal."

"If only I could talk to Ronnie!" she said pitifully, placing her hand on the boy's hot forehead. "He would tell me the truth."

"He can't talk to anybody now," said Gayner. "First we thought he was drunk, he acted so plumb crazy. Then Doc Wren said he had a fever, and put him to bed."

"Is he very ill?" inquired Agatha, trying to cover the quivering of her chin with her handkerchief.

"Just a touch of grippe. Doc Wren says he'll be all right in a few days."

Agatha bent and pressed her lips to her brother's cheek. He did not move. When she raised her head she was crying frankly.

"May I see the girl—Mittie?" she choked.

The sheriff coughed.

"Well, you ain't a relative—but, oh, I reckon you can!"

Mrs. Druce's diamonds, her fur coat, and the fragrance that clung to her garments impressed him—though he didn't "hold with folks showin' off finery to make you feel cheap."

"I'll wait outside," Armitage said,

with tact. "She may talk to you. I should embarrass her."

MITTIE sat on her cot, her hands clasped in the lap of a gown that Agatha had purchased for her so short a time before. Her head, with its shingled curls, was sunk on her breast. Her heart-shaped face was white, and there were deep shadows under her dark eyes.

As the sheriff unlocked the door, she looked up. A little cry escaped her when she saw Agatha, and she cringed against the wall as if in terror.

"A lady to see you," Gayner said brusquely.

Agatha held out her hand.

"Mittie!" she said gently.

"Oh, Mrs. Druce, Mrs. Druce," cried the girl, ignoring the outstretched hand and covering her face with both of her own.

Agatha sat on the cot beside her and put an arm about the heaving shoulders.

"Tell me about it, Mittie."

"I didn't know he wanted to marry me. I didn't think he would when he learned who I was, and I knew you'd tell him. I loved him so much that I wanted to die. It was like dying to marry Mr. Lalock, but he took me to his house and made me do it. I didn't much care what happened. Then Ronald came and Mr. Lalock found him there. He wouldn't go. Mr. Lalock pointed a pistol at him and then fell over dead."

"Was it Mr. Lalock's own pistol that shot him?"

"No, Mrs. Druce. No—it didn't go off, I know it didn't, but the sheriff thinks it did. Shots had been fired from it, and the bullet in Mr. Lalock's temple is just like the one left in the revolver; but it didn't go off."

"Mittie"—Agatha looked steadily at the girl—"you didn't shoot Lalock, did you?"

"Oh, no! No!" Mittie recoiled as if the other woman struck her. "Oh, no! There must have been some one at the window. I couldn't see anything. I was looking at Mr. Lalock. I thought he was going to shoot your brother. I tried to make Ronald go away. Then I heard the sound, and Mr. Lalock fell across the table. Oh, that's the truth, Mrs. Druce!"

"And Ronnie didn't have his hand on the gun?"

"Not then—not until after it fell out of Mr. Lalock's hand. Then he picked it up. We thought Mr. Lalock had fired at Ronald, but it was cold. I remember Ronnie said it was cold."

"Do you know this is going to be very serious, Mittie? Mr. Lalock was a rich man, and they'll say you married him to get his money."

"But I didn't. I won't ever touch his money. Won't that prove I didn't marry him for it? I don't care what they do to me, Mrs. Druce, if they'll only let Ronnie go. He didn't know what he was doing when he came to that house, or what he was saying."

"What did he say?"

"That Mr. Lalock couldn't separate us. He was sick—"

"He's very sick now, Mittie."

"I know; and I can't see him or speak to him. It's all my fault, too. If he'd never known me, this wouldn't have happened to him. Oh, I wish I had died in the snow! I wish Mr. Lalock had never found me!"

"Has your grandfather been to see you?"

"Not yet. I don't suppose he knows anything about it. No one goes to see him, and if he doesn't come to town he won't know about it for days."

"Do you want me to stop and tell him?"

"Yes, please."

"Mr. Armitage has sent to New York for a lawyer. When he comes, you must tell him all the truth, Mittie."

"I have told *you* the truth, Mrs. Druce."

"I hope you have. I'm going to try to help you, as well as Ronnie."

"Oh, thank you! You must hate me."

"No." Agatha rose. "If I hate any one, it's myself."

CHAPTER XIII

THE INQUEST

GRANT BRADLEY arrived in Roan City on the day before the inquest, one week after Leonard Lalock had been murdered. It had been impossible for him to come sooner.

A tall, stalwart man in his late forties, black-haired, brown-eyed, and homely, Bradley had been a criminal investigator before he became a lawyer, and was a shrewd student of human nature. He rarely lost a case, and never accepted as a client a person whom he believed to be guilty.

Before seeing Ronald, he had a talk with Agatha and Armitage, from whom he learned all the details of the case as they knew it. He became convinced that circumstantial evidence alone had caused the boy's arrest.

"These people are prejudiced against Standish," Armitage informed him. "Lalock was an influential person in the community, and, while not popular, was highly respected. On the other hand, a certain jealousy exists toward all of us who stay at the Summit House. The natives here dislike the leisure class on general principles, and mistrust tourists. The fact that Standish was in love with Lalock's bride, and that the bride's position was equivocal, to say the least, also militates against him. They're pretty sure to indict him, and they'll try to convict him."

"I see," said Bradley.

Later he called at the jail, where he conferred first with Ronald and then with the girl. Afterward he talked with the sheriff and the coroner.

"Of course," he said to Dr. Wren, "I'm absolutely convinced that Lalock's gun never fired the shot that killed him. You fellows admit that it was cold when you arrived. You say that the housekeeper called you immediately after hearing the shot, and that it didn't take you five minutes to get to the house. Naturally the gun was cold by the time you got there, but there should have been the odor of powder on it. Standish insists that it was cold when he picked it up."

"The bullet in it is the same as the one in Lalock's temple," argued Gayner. "And the empty shells—"

"Granted. If there had been only one empty shell I'd say you had something to work on; but there were five. That gun had been used and not cleaned—and not recently. While you are tying a net around Standish you're letting the real murderer get away, and I'll prove it!"

"There's the motive, the opportunity, and the crime," said Wren. "I don't say he shot Lalock, but there's a lot of circumstantial evidence. If that gun didn't do the work, where's the one that did?"

"That's one of the things I'm going to find out," Bradley asserted. "I hope to have something tangible to work on before the inquest to-morrow."

"Cocky guy!" remarked Gayner,

watching the lawyer's departing figure. "If he was in New York, probably he'd get Standish off scot free; but money can't buy everything down here. If Standish didn't shoot Len Lalock, then that Blaine girl did!"

THE inquest was to be held in the courthouse at ten o'clock. Ronald, though very weak and still running a little temperature, was considered well enough to attend. The official inquiry couldn't be postponed any longer.

Mittie had not been allowed to see Ronald during the long, tragic week. Sheriff Gayner, a little uncertain how to treat prisoners under such circumstances, and totally without sympathy for what he called "an unholy love," had decided to keep them apart. Both of the young people, therefore, looked forward to the inquest as an opportunity to meet. Just a handclasp, a look, a word, would be a comfort.

Mittie had suffered far more than Ronald, for in his fevered state his mind had been practically a blank for three days. Her suffering had been chiefly for him. For herself, she cared little what happened. No shame could be greater than what she had already endured; but it was maddening to think that Ronald—fine, clean, with a wonderful future before him—should be caught in such a tangle because of her.

She thought of confessing to the deed herself; but then she remembered that it was because of a lie—Agatha Druce's lie—that all this had happened. Another falsehood might only plunge them deeper into the meshes of the law. If Mittie had never stolen another woman's identity, she would never have met Ronald, he would never have loved her, and both he and she would be free.

Hour after hour she tried to solve the puzzle. Who had killed the man she married? What bitter hatred had impelled the murderer to stand in the garden by the open window, to aim a revolver at him, and to pull the trigger?

Bradley's questions had terrified her. He seemed to be trying to make her admit that Ronald had committed the crime. He had quizzed her about her relations with Ronald and about all that had occurred during that night on the mountain. He had asked her how long she had known Lalock, why she had married him, and what her home life had been. She was certain he knew that she had not told the real reason for her marriage. Added to her anxiety about Ronald was her fear lest the lawyer might discover the crime in her grandfather's past. If that was brought to light, old Asa would be sent to prison.

The courthouse was crowded as Gayner led her up the aisle and seated her in a little pew opposite Ronald Standish, but she was conscious of no other presence than Ronald's. Their eyes met, and a message flashed between them—a message that said:

"I love you. Nothing can change my love!"

Ronald was very pale, but otherwise perfectly composed. Mittie saw Agatha sitting beside him, and Bradley, the lawyer. Near by was Hal Armitage.

After a little while Mittie managed to look around her. Mrs. Button, with her expressionless mask of a face, sat in the front row. Candace, the colored maid, was near her, and behind her sat Asa Blaine. Close at hand stood Merwin, the policeman, with his arms folded.

She saw other faces, a sea of them—eager, curious faces, some of which she knew, some she didn't. Most of

them were hostile faces. Women looked at her scornfully, then whispered behind their hands to their companions. Scowling men glanced at her and then at Ronald, and whispered also.

In the judge's seat sat Dr. Wren, with Sheriff Gayner beside him, smiling grimly behind his red mustache.

Mittie saw a slender blond girl come into the courtroom, on the arm of a white-haired man. She walked slowly, holding her squirrel coat about her, and her head high. There were more whispers. The girl bowed to Ronald, who half rose and then sank back in his chair. Mittie knew that this was Cecily Howard, the *fiancée* whom Ronald had given up for her.

Dr. Wren cleared his throat, removed his glasses, wiped them, and replaced them on his thin, long nose.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, and coughed again. This was his first inquest. "One week ago to-day our peaceful community was unutterably shocked by a foul murder. One of our citizens, a highly respected and peaceable gentleman, met his death at the hands of—er—the hands of an assassin. We do not know who this scoundrel was, who because of hatred for Leonard Lalock struck him down in the prime of life; but we are going to find out. Ronald Standish had great reason to dislike Leonard Lalock. Lalock had just married the woman Ronald Standish loved — a woman whose reputation is, to say the least of it, unsavory. One finds it hard to understand why Leonard Lalock had married her, but love — er — goes whither it is sent. Ronald Standish, with bitterness in his heart, went to Lalock's home and tried to induce Lalock's wife to leave her husband."

Mittie gave a little cry. Dr. Wren turned his accusing eyes toward her, and she dropped her head.

"The two men, Leonard Lalock and Ronald Standish, quarreled. Just what was said, and just what happened next, we can only conjecture. Both the housekeeper, Mrs. Button, and the colored maid, Candace Jones, heard a shot. The sound came from the library. Mrs. Button reached the room first. When she opened the door, Ronald Standish was bending over the body of Leonard Lalock, with a revolver in his hand. Ladies and gentlemen, we arrested Standish. We are going to ascertain, if possible, whether that arrest was justified, or if Standish is an innocent man, as he asserts he is. Ronald Standish, will you—"

Ronald was on his feet, his face livid, his eyes flashing.

"I will," he cried; "but first I want you to retract what you said about Mrs. Lalock. If ever there was a woman pure and—"

Wren rapped on the table.

"I said her reputation was unsavory. I know nothing of Mrs. Lalock's character."

"You insinuated—" Ronald began.

"This inquest has nothing to do with Mrs. Lalock's character, except where it affects the murder of her husband; but isn't it true that just before her marriage you and she spent the night together in a tourists' camp alone?"

"We were caught by the storm and—"

"And you spent the night there together?"

"Yes, but—"

"And you offered Mittie Blaine marriage because of that night?"

"I did not. I asked her to marry me because I loved her, and I'm not

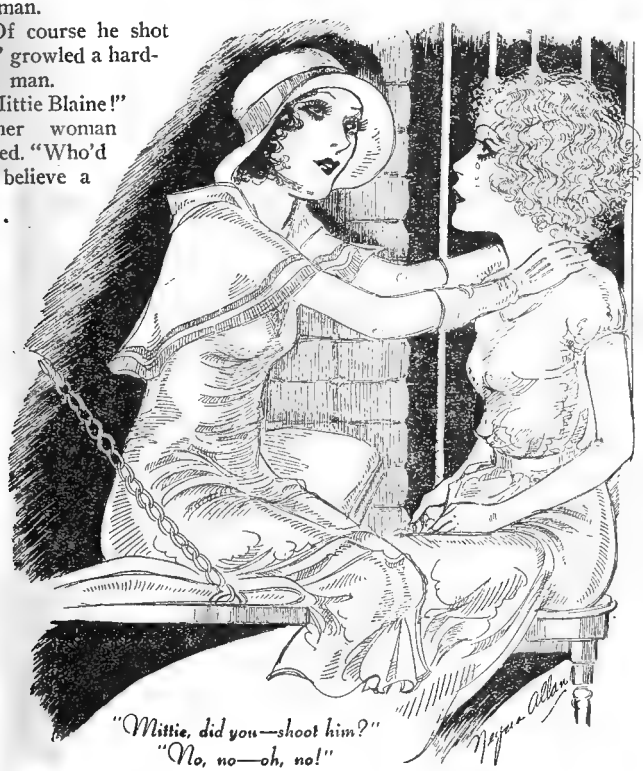
ashamed of that love. My offer of marriage stands good now."

A buzz went through the courtroom.

"Isn't he good looking?" whispered a woman.

"Of course he shot him," growled a hard-faced man.

"Mittie Blaine!" another woman sneered. "Who'd ever believe a man like that would want the likes of her?"



"Mittie, did you—shoot him?"
"No, no—oh, no!"

Agatha's head was drooping. Cecily Howard's face was dead white, her hands gripped together.

"Courage!" said Armitage, touching Agatha's shoulder. "The boy's fine!"

There was a call for silence. Then the coroner resumed his questioning.

"How did you learn of Mittie Blaine's marriage?" he asked Ronald.

"From her grandfather."

"Oh, you knew him, too?"

"No, I didn't know him. The first time I talked to him was when he told me his granddaughter had married Lalock."

"Then you immediately went to Lalock's home?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you have a gun, or a weapon of any sort, in your possession when you went there?"

"I did not. Lalock drew that revolver out of his desk, and—"

"Tell us about it—the truth!"

Ronald spoke rapidly, recounting in detail all that he remembered.

"I was ill. I suppose I had the grippe then. It's all a little confused in my mind. I only know this positively—I never shot Lalock. The person who did it fired through a window on my right."

"That'll do. Mrs. Lalock!"

RONALD caught Mittie's hand and pressed it reassuringly as he passed her on his way back to his seat.

"Damned yokel!" he muttered under his breath to Agatha. "What's he trying to do to her? I don't mind him razzing me, but if he starts on her, I won't stand it!"

"Easy, easy!" murmured Bradley. "Wren is full of self-importance and he'll trip himself without any assistance from you."

"You are Mrs. Leonard Lalock?" the coroner asked, leaning forward with a greedy look in his eyes.

"Yes, sir," replied Mittie, her voice so low that it could scarcely be heard in the court room.

"You were Mittie Blaine before you married?"

"Yes, sir."

"You lived in a box car, didn't you, with that—er—man?"

Wren's finger pointed to old Asa, who sat crouched in his chair, his shoulders hunched about his neck, his bleary eyes half closed.

"With my grandfather," Mittie answered. "Yes, sir."

"How did you meet Ronald Standish?"

"Is that question necessary?" interposed Bradley, jumping to his feet.

"It is, sir," Wren answered with dignity, "or I wouldn't have asked it."

"This is an inquest to determine who murdered Leonard Lalock," Bradley argued suavely, "not to find out how Mrs. Lalock made the acquaintance of Mr. Standish."

"Have you any objection to telling us, Mrs. Lalock?" inquired the coroner.

"No. I—I met Mr. Standish at the Summit House. His sister introduced us."

"Oh!" Wren rubbed his hands together and looked at Agatha. There was another buzz in the court room. "*Introduced* you, eh? Did you work for her?"

"Yes, and no. She wanted to give me a chance to better myself—"

"And she introduced you to her brother, hoping that he would marry you?"

The sneer stung the girl.

"No! No! She—"

"Just a minute!" Bradley interrupted again. "I submit that your other witnesses should be questioned before you go back to Mrs. Lalock's meeting with Standish. I must ask you either to put relevant questions to the witness or to dismiss her."

Wren sputtered with indignation. His hatchet face became brick red in color. He looked questioningly at the sheriff. Gayner slowly closed one eye. The wink practically said:

"Humor him. He's a dodo from the city—give him rope, and he'll hang himself."

"Tell us, Mrs. Lalock," Wren demanded, "just what happened in Mr. Lalock's library a week ago to-day."

MITTIE repeated Ronald's words as she remembered them. Then she was sent to her seat, and Mrs. Button was called to testify. A

great many in the court room had never seen the housekeeper before, though she had lived in their midst for years. Her appearance—her gargoyle face, hunched shoulders, and twisted spine—had a startling effect. Never had she appeared so grotesque, so repulsive, and yet so pathetic, as when she stood with the winter sunshine pouring through the windows like a searchlight full upon her.

"You were Mr. Lalock's housekeeper?" Wren began.

"Yes, sir."

"For how long?"

"More than five years."

The woman's voice, without inflection, low, but rasping, carried to all parts of the room.

"Before you were employed by Mr. Lalock, where did you live?"

"In New York City."

"Why did you come here?"

"I was sick, and came here for my health. I couldn't stay without employment, so I secured a position as housekeeper with Mr. Lalock."

"You are a widow?"

"Yes, sir."

"During the five years with Mr. Lalock, did you find him kindly and generous?"

"Yes, sir—very."

"Do you know of any enemies he possessed?"

The woman hesitated.

"No, sir," she said, after a moment.

"Did you know his friends?"

"No, sir. When he entertained—which was seldom—I kept in my room."

"He didn't treat you as an equal, then?"

"No, sir. We were always servant and master."

"I see! Were you aware he was going to be married?"

"He told me of it the day before."

"And you were surprised?"

"Very much."

"Because he was going to be married, or because of the girl he was going to marry?"

Again Mrs. Button hesitated.

"Well," she said at length, "because the girl was so young."

"You didn't think it possible for a young girl to love a man as old as Leonard Lalock?"

"No, sir."

"And you thought Mr. Lalock deserved a woman's love, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"You thought this girl wanted his money, and that she might have a young lover—"

Bradley sprang to his feet again, but the coroner rapped out another question before the lawyer could protest.

"You admitted the prisoner into Mr. Lalock's house?"

"I answered his ring."

"Did he ask for Mr. Lalock or his wife?"

"He said, 'I want to see Mrs. Lalock.' She must have heard him, for she came into the hall before I could announce him."

"And then?"

"She took his hands and led him into the library. I went into the dining room."

"Did you hear what they said?"

"No, sir."

"Had the prisoner a revolver when he came into the house?"

"I don't know, sir. I didn't see any."

"But you saw one in his hand when you opened the door, later?"

"Yes, sir; but it was Mr. Lalock's revolver."

"You are sure of that?"

"Yes, sir—positive."

"How can you be so positive?"

"I had seen it in his desk many times, and Mr. Lalock had warned me not to touch it, as it was loaded."

"Several shots had been fired from that gun. Do you know anything about them?"

"Mr. Lalock shot some woodpeckers last summer."

"I see! How long was it after you admitted the prisoner that Mr. Lalock came in?"

"I don't know. I didn't know he was in the house until I heard his voice."

"Was it angry?"

"Yes, sir—very angry. I didn't hear what he said, but I knew he was furious."

"And then you heard the shot?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you went immediately to the library?"

Once more the housekeeper hesitated.

"No, sir, not immediately. I wasn't certain where the sound came from. I ran into the kitchen first, and asked Candace if she had heard it. She said yes. Then I went to the library and opened the door."

"And you saw the prisoner with the revolver in his hand?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's all, Mrs. Button."

Bradley straightened his shoulders abruptly, and half rose. Then he folded his arms and leaned back in his chair.

"Candace Jones!"

CHAPTER XIV

ASA BLAINE'S STORY

THE colored maid answered the coroner's questions with evident enjoyment of her brief hour of importance.

"No, sah, Ah didn't see him come in the house. No, sah. Ah was upstairs, tidyin' up the room Mistah Lalock said was tuh be Mis' Lalock's. Ah didn't hear no quarrel. Ah didn't hear nuthin' till that pistol banged off."

"Where were you when you heard it?"

"Ah was in the kitchen. Mis' Button tole yuh."

"Oh, you came downstairs while Mr. Lalock and the prisoner were quarreling?"

"Ah reckon so."

"Didn't you have to pass the library to reach the kitchen?"

"No, sah. Thar's a back stairs. I always uses hit."

"Did you know you had heard a pistol shot before Mrs. Button told you?"

"I thought that was whut I heard—yes, sah."

"And you went with Mrs. Button to the library?"

"Yes, sah."

"May I ask the witness a question?" Bradley inquired.

Wren nodded reluctantly.

"Miss Jones, is there a door between the kitchen and dining room, or do you have to go through the hallway to reach either room?"

"You has tuh go through the hallway."

"That's all, thank you."

"Why did you ask her that?" Agatha whispered.

"I wanted to see if any one could have come in through the front door unnoticed," he answered.

"But that doesn't prove anything, does it?"

Bradley smiled, but did not reply.

"Asa Blaine!"

As the shabby old man moved up the aisle, Bradley shifted his position.

Every eye was on the squatter, but Asa seemed unconcerned. With his hands in the torn pockets of a red sweater, and a cap pulled down over his grizzled locks, he faced the coroner.

Agatha drew a deep breath, half a sob. Ronald's hands gripped convulsively as he glanced across at Mittie. There was a sick, hunted look in her dark eyes, and they avoided his.

Mrs. Button, leaning forward, rested her chin on the chair in front of her and stared at the squatter. Her dead eyes, under their puffy white lids, seemed to come to life. Bradley, watching her, was startled by the malevolence in her expression. If ever a woman hated a man, that woman hated Asa Blaine. Why?

"Your name is Asa Blaine?" Wren began.

He looked triumphantly over the court room. This man, this uncouth, blear-eyed, disreputable specimen of manhood, was the grandfather of the girl whom Ronald Standish wanted to make his wife. Didn't it prove that Mittie was no good? Blood will tell.

"Yes," replied Asa, lifting his cap and squaring his shoulders.

"You are acquainted with the prisoner?"

"He came to see me to ask where Mittie was, if you call that an acquaintance."

"And you told him where she could be found?"

"I told him she had married Len Lalock that day."

"Did that excite him?"

"I couldn't say. I wasn't in a frame of mind to notice any one else's emotions."

"You mean you were *drunk?*" shouted Wren.

"Well, partially so, perhaps—but that wasn't the only reason."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I was pretty badly upset by Mittie's marrying Lalock, if you want the truth."

"And why were you upset?"

"He was too old for her, and"—Asa looked steadily at Mittie—"she was too good for him."

"Leonard Lalock was one of our most respected citizens," the coroner said with severity.

"Yes? Well, he was my friend," Asa grinned. "We'd been friends for twenty-five years, and perhaps I knew him better than this town did. I say Mittie was too good for him. I said it to him alive, and I'll say it of him dead."

Again there was a sensation in the court room, with much rustling of skirts, whispering, and general confusion. Wren's cheeks puffed out with a swell of righteous anger.

"Are you insinuating that Leonard Lalock was not a good man?" he demanded.

"I'm not insinuating anything. I'm saying that Leonard Lalock was a damned scoundrel!"

MITTIE gave a choked cry. Oh, why, why was old Asa talking that way? Was he trying to implicate himself? These people hated him. They would be only too pleased to put a rope around his neck. Did he think to help her by injuring himself?

"So you hated Mr. Lalock?"

"I did."

"You said he was your friend!"

"There are some queer friendships." Asa's eyes did not waver. "It wasn't liking each other that drew us together."

"You know that the prisoner and your granddaughter both claim he was shot through the window?"

"Yes."

"You didn't"—Wren raised his voice—"you didn't creep to that window and—"

Asa laughed.

"No, I wasn't anywhere near the house. If you want to find out where I was that afternoon, ask Bert Smith. I went to town after the young fellow left me and played pool for two hours in Smith's pool parlor. There were a dozen men there who can prove that what I say is true."

A little of the triumph left Wren's manner.

"Why didn't you like Mr. Lalock?"

"That's my business."

"I don't like your attitude Mr. Blaine. Answer my questions respectfully, or—"

Asa folded his arms and stared the other man down.

"I'll answer any question I can concerning the murder, but anything regarding my feeling for Lalock is my private affair."

Wren coughed. He was a little embarrassed.

"You—er—you say you did not think Lalock was good enough for your granddaughter. Did you by any chance expect her to make a better marriage?"

"Why not? She's a pretty girl."

"But she's your granddaughter!"

The old man turned deliberately, and his eyes swept the crowded court room. They rested upon Ronald, then upon Mittie. For a split second they seemed to be trying to read the girl's thoughts. Then Asa turned to the coroner again and said in a much louder voice than he had used before:

"Mittie isn't my granddaughter."

"What?"

Mittie sprang to her feet and stumbled toward him. Asa held up his hand.

"Mittie is no relation of mine. I never was married. I never had a son."

"This is most—er—extraordinary!" gasped the coroner. "Why have you claimed her all these years?"

"If I didn't know that you bloodhounds had it in for her because you think she's kin of mine, I'd have gone on claiming it for the rest of my life. She's the only decent thing I've ever known, the only human being I ever loved; but when my love hurts her, I'm ready to tell the truth. She's not my granddaughter."

"Grandpa!" Mittie sobbed. "Grandpa!"

He put his arm around her and held her against his shoulder.

"I found her—a wee little baby—wandering terrified on the side of the mountain in the midst of the forest fire. God knows how she ever got there. It will never be known whether some distracted mother struggled through the burning woods and lost her life in an effort to save her child, or whether Mittie ran away before the fire started, and somehow reached safety before the flames made an impassable screen. She could tell me nothing, could only cling to me and sob 'Mamma!' I carried her down into the valley, and for days I waited for some one to claim her; but no one came. I gave her shelter. My own house had burned, but I found a place for her in the box car that has been our home ever since."

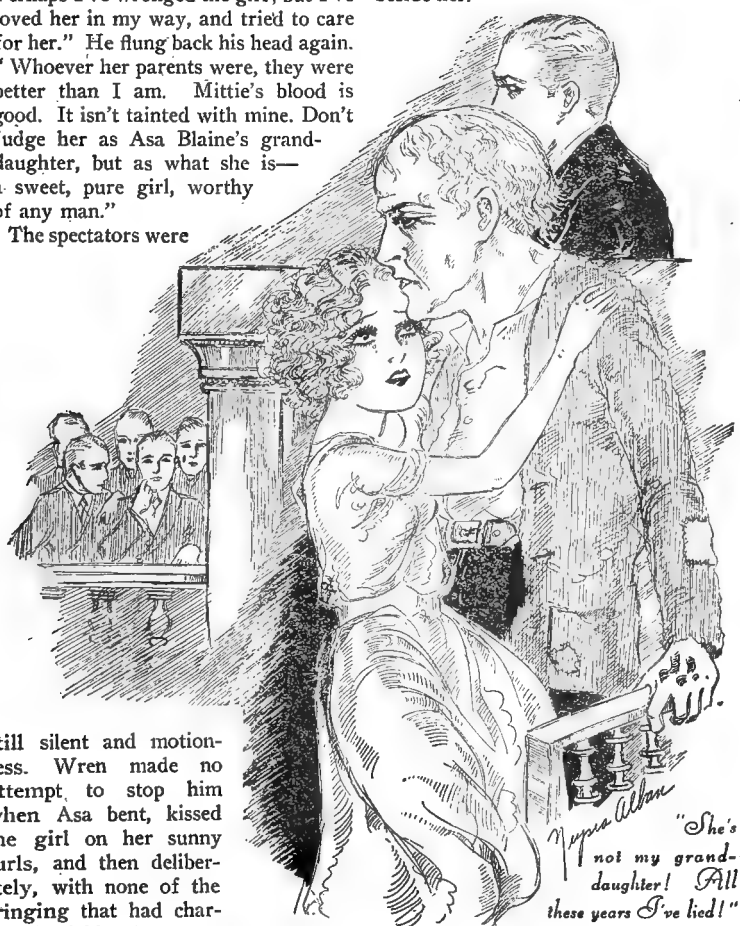
The court room was silent now, eagerly listening to old Asa's story.

"During those awful days," he continued, "no one paid any attention to me or the child. Her little arms crept into my heart. It was easy to lie, and to call her mine. No one knew much about me. It was a protection for me, too." His gaze wavered. "Public

opinion was against me, and my story that I had lost a son of my own in the fire helped to turn it the other way. Perhaps I've wronged the girl; but I've loved her in my way, and tried to care for her." He flung back his head again. "Whoever her parents were, they were better than I am. Mittie's blood is good. It isn't tainted with mine. Don't judge her as Asa Blaine's granddaughter, but as what she is—a sweet, pure girl, worthy of any man."

The spectators were still silent and motionless. Wren made no attempt to stop him when Asa bent, kissed the girl on her sunny curls, and then deliberately, with none of the cringing that had characterized him for years, walked down the aisle and outdoors.

Mittie gave a little moan and started after him. Ronald reached her before the sheriff did. He took her in his arms, held her for a moment, and then gently led her back to her seat. With his arm still about her, he sat down beside her.



Wren coughed and looked interrogatively at Gayner. Gayner scratched his head.

"Adjourn," his lips motioned.

"We'll adjourn until two o'clock," Wren announced. "Merwin, go after Blaine. I'm not finished with him. Send for Bert Smith, too."

AS Asa reached the door, Merwin started after him, down the aisle. Halfway along it the policeman was stopped by Mrs. Button. The housekeeper was standing up and gesticulating, her weird mask of a face convulsed with emotion. Her twisted mouth moved spasmodically, but no sound came.

"What is it, ma'am?" inquired Merwin, catching her arm.

She nodded violently in Asa's direction. As the squatter disappeared she found her voice.

"That man!" she croaked in a hoarse whisper. "Don't let him get away!"

"What?"

"He—he murdered Leonard Lalock's first wife!"

Her statement reached the ears of several people seated near by, who were craning their necks to see the disturbance. Instantly a buzz started up.

Wren came from the platform.

"What did she say?" he thundered, forgetting his position as coroner.

"Says Asa Blaine murdered Lalock's first wife," Merwin flung at him.

The housekeeper had dropped back in her chair. Her face was twisting again, but between little gasps she made herself understood.

"Don't let him get away! He murdered Leonard Lalock's first wife!"

Merwin sprinted down the corridor and out through the front door.

"That's a very strange statement, madam," said Dr. Wren, regaining some of his dignity. "Will you please inform us where and how you got that impression? As I remember, the late Mrs. Lalock lost her life twelve years ago in a forest fire."

The woman nodded. Rising slowly, for a moment she rested her hands on the back of the chair in front of her. She seemed to be growing calmer.

"I'll tell you," she said.

Wren whirled, walked back to the platform, and motioned her to follow. She did so, a grotesque figure in a loose drab cloth dress that did not conceal her misshapen form. She nervously fumbled with the ties of the old-fashioned bonnet that she wore on her white hair, and her curious eyes stared from one face to another.

"Well?"

Mittie's hand, icy cold, moved in Ronald's. His fingers clasped it tighter.

"What does she mean?" the frightened girl whispered. "How can she say such a thing?"

"She's crazy," he answered. "She's as mad as a hatter. Look at her eyes!"

"We're waiting, madam," Wren snapped impatiently. "You've stated that Asa Blaine murdered the first Mrs. Lalock. We want to know on what evidence you make such a statement."

"I heard" — she hesitated — "I heard him confess it."

"What?"

"That isn't true!" Mittie cried, springing to her feet. "That isn't true! You don't know my grandfather. He could never have said such a thing! She's crazy, Dr. Wren, or she couldn't say that!"

"Silence! Silence!" Wren banged his fist on the table. "You keep still, Mrs. Lalock, or you'll be taken out of the court room!"

Ronald pulled her down beside him again.

"Do as he says, darling. You'll only get into trouble if you try to defend your grandfather."

Mittie dropped her head on Ronald's shoulder and sobbed softly; but the spectators were too intent upon Lalock's housekeeper to notice the young people.

Wren rubbed his hands together and looked slyly at Gayner. This was going to be a sensation. Boy, what the newspapers could do to this! He resumed his examination of Mrs. Button.

"You said you heard Asa Blaine confess that he murdered Mrs. Lalock. When did you hear this confession?"

"A week ago."

"And to whom did he make the confession?"

"To Mr. Lalock."

THERE was another buzz of excited whispers. Wren rapped on the table again.

"Are you sure? If he confessed such a dastardly thing as that, why didn't Mr. Lalock tell the authorities and have the man put under arrest? Why didn't *you?*"

The woman's twisted mouth twitched in a weird grimace.

"I did nothing because I didn't know who the man was. I overheard him by accident. I was in the hall just outside the library door. I recognized him to-day. Justice is always meted out to the guilty, and he is guilty!"

"That doesn't explain Mr. Lalock's silence."

"He had his reasons for silence—the same reasons that made him call that man friend. Friend!" She burst into a peal of startling laughter. "Friend! They hated each other. I heard them! That man"—she whirled abruptly and pointed an accusing finger at Asa, who was coming through the door with Merwin, the policeman—"that man set fire to the forest twelve years ago. He was paid to do it by Leonard Lalock. They did it to destroy a woman whose money Lalock wanted. That's what I heard them talking about!"

A strangled oath escaped the squatter. He gave Merwin a jab in the chest with his elbow, flung both hands in front of him, and, before the policeman could recover from the blow, dashed out of the building. Two men near the door sought to detain him, but he pushed them aside as if they were reeds, and was gone.

In the pandemonium caused by the woman's words and Asa's sudden exit, Wren lost his head completely. He started down the aisle, followed by Sheriff Gayner, shrieking:

"Stop him! Don't let him go!"

Then he whirled around and collided with the sheriff, and both of them fell in a heap. Hysterical laughter brought them to their feet, red-faced and furious.

Public opinion, hitherto against Ronald, now changed completely. There was a babel of confused talk in the court room.

"Of course Blaine murdered Lalock!" cried one spectator. "That young man is innocent."

"The swine, he should have been strung up long ago!" said another.

"Lalock have the forest set afire? Good God, it doesn't seem possible!"

"Lynch him! Lynch that damned squatter!" shouted a chorus of voices.

Cowering beside Ronald, her face chalk white, her body bathed in cold sweat, Mittie heard the ominous words. Lalock had said that they would lynch her grandfather if they ever learned that Asa was an escaped convict. The old man was a drunkard, but not a murderer! He had fired the

forest, but he hadn't done it to kill some one! Her grandfather—no, he wasn't her grandfather, but he had loved her and cared for her. He wasn't a murderer. Oh, God, don't let them catch him!

Even if he had murdered Lalock, Lalock deserved death, for he would have killed Ronald Standish. Ronald—why, Ronald was there beside her, holding her hand in his; but how could he love her now?

"Courage, sweetheart, courage!" he whispered, as if reading her thoughts.

"It's a lie, Ronald! He never killed any one."

"I know, sweetheart."

"She said Lalock hired him to do it!"

"To set fire to the forest. Perhaps he didn't know—"

"Oh, he didn't! He couldn't have known there was any one there. He was kind to me in his way."

"I know, dear."

Again there was a confusion of voices, growing louder and fiercer.

"For God's sake!" It was Bradley who sprang into the midst of the hostile crowd. "Don't become beasts! This woman's story isn't proved yet. Nothing has been proved. Dismiss the spectators, Gayner! Send them away!"

Merwin came back. He was alone.

"Blaine got away," the policeman said. "I didn't see hide nor hair of him."

Suddenly everything seemed to go black before Mittie's eyes. She was conscious only of Ronald's arms that held her tightly as she sank into oblivion.

The attention of the crowd was centered elsewhere.

"The housekeeper has fainted," Bradley shouted. "Let me get her out in the air!"

He bent quickly and lifted Mrs. Button's fragile form. Those about him were awed by his commanding manner and by the quiet figure in his arms. They drew aside and let him pass out of the building.

CHAPTER XV

"WILL YOU MARRY ME?"

THE crowd surged after the lawyer. Sheriff Gayner reached the street in time to see Bradley place the unconscious Mrs. Button in Agatha's sedan and step in beside her. Then, remembering that he had left two unguarded prisoners in the court room, he darted back into the building.

"Where does this woman live?" Bradley inquired of no one in particular.

"Ah'll show you, mistah. Ah lives thar, too." Candace, her arms akimbo, pushed her way to his side. "Ah wuz the maid thar, till Mistah Lalock got killed."

"Get in," said Bradley, opening the door for her.

Dr. Wren had not yet recovered his dignity, and was still smarting from the laughter caused by his fall. He glowered at the sheriff behind his glasses.

"That Merwin's a darned fool," he muttered. "Why didn't he keep after Blaine?"

"How could he, when he didn't see him no place? Larkins"—nodding to a tall, red-haired man near the door—"I 'point you deputy, and you, Smith, I 'point you one, too. Arrest Asa Blaine on sight. Now all of you go out and find him!"

There was a little group around Mittie, who, pitifully white, with blue circles around her eyes and a blue line about her lips, half lay in Ronald's

They crowded about her, offering words of comfort

arms. Agatha Druce was there, and so were Hal Armitage and Cecily Howard. Cecily was almost as white as Mittie, but she was trying hard to be a good sport. Colonel Howard, standing a little apart, with his hands in his pockets, frowned his disapproval of his daughter's presence in the court room.

Ronald greeted Gayner's approach with a wan smile.

"Now at least you can't blame *her* for what the old man is! Blood will tell, and there's none of his blood in her!"

"I'm not certain he wasn't lying," said the disgruntled sheriff. "Come on—I've got to take you back to the jail."

"Oh, Mr. Gayner," Agatha exclaimed, "you aren't going to take them to jail after what has happened to-day? You know my brother is innocent. If that old man—"

"This inquest hasn't proved anything yet." Gayner scowled at the coroner. "It was a hell of an inquest, anyway. I could have done better myself!"

Dr. Wren bristled.

"Considering what occurred to-day—" he began, then coughed. Why argue with Gayner? The sheriff was an uncouth ignoramus. What did he know of the law?

"Come on!" The sheriff touched Ronald's shoulder. "I can't stand here all day. I want my dinner."

Mittie raised her head and looked at Cecily. Cecily's blue eyes were misty, and her lips quivered as she held out her hand to Mittie.

"I'm sure," she said in a sweet but husky voice, "that when you learn who you really are you'll be a princess at least. You are lovely enough!"

"Oh, Cecily!" Ronald choked.

She laughed tremulously.

"Why not? It's all like a story, isn't it? And wouldn't that be the cor-

rect ending? Anyway" — she patted Mittie's hand with her free one—"I'm sure everything is going to come out all right, and you'll live happily ever after. Are you coming up to the hotel, Agatha?"

"Not now. Later, perhaps."

"I'll see you then."

With her arrogant head held beautifully poised, Cecily passed from the court room. Only Ronald Standish and her father were aware that she was suffering.

A little crowd followed the prisoners back to the jail. Agatha stood on the steps of the courthouse and watched them turn the corner with the sheriff. When they were no longer in sight she spoke to Armitage.

"It's only a question of time, isn't it, Hal, until Ronnie's free?"

"I hope so. I don't see how they can bring an indictment against him, after that old woman's testimony. If the squatter hadn't made a break-away, I shouldn't have given the story much credence; and yet" — his eyes closed speculatively—"even if what she said is true, it doesn't necessarily prove that Asa Blaine killed Lalock, and that is what they are holding Ronald for. I don't like to discourage you, Agatha, but don't raise your hopes too high. Of one thing at least we're certain, now—Lalock must have been a scoundrel, and the public isn't so badly prejudiced against his widow and Ronald."

"I wonder just who and what the girl is," Agatha mused.

"I'm afraid it will never matter much to Ronald. He's going to marry her the moment he is free."

"Yes!" She raised her dark eyes and looked steadily at Armitage. "And I'm glad that he is. It's rather fine of him, isn't it?"

"Darned fine! It's taught me something."

"Yes?"

"That love is the biggest thing in the world. Those kids have found something I'll never have. They've suffered, and they'll probably go on suffering, but in spite of that they'll have happiness."

"Aren't you happy, Hal?"

"Is it possible to gratify ambition and be happy?"

"I don't know. Is your ambition gratified?"

"Not yet." His brooding eyes stared straight ahead. "I doubt if it ever will be. I've decided — Agatha, will you marry me?"

"What?" She almost lost her balance in her amazement. "This is no time to joke now, Hal."

"I'm not joking."

"But I told you, why, I—"

"I know. I understand perfectly. I realize you must have cared—terribly—to do such a thing. At heart you are not cruel or dishonest. I made you so. I told you I was fonder of you than of any woman. What you did showed me what I refused to recognize before—that I really loved you. Well, Agatha?"

"Pride should compel me to refuse you," she said softly; "but I have no pride. If you want me, with my brother still under arrest for murder —with a potential sister-in-law without a name—you may certainly have me."

"If we weren't in such a public place I'd kiss you," he said; "but we'll have to reserve that for later."

CANDACE opened the door, and Grant Bradley, still carrying the housekeeper in his arms, entered the Lalock home.

"They's a couch in the library," the colored girl said. "Most like you want to tote her in there."

Bradley nodded. Candace pushed open the library door, and he placed the unconscious woman on the divan before the fire.

"Any brandy in the house?" he inquired.

"Yes, sah, Ah thinks so. Ah believe Mistah Lalock use to keep liquor in that cabinet."

"Get me some, please."

He bent over Mrs. Button and rubbed her cold hands, while Candace found a decanter and poured some of its contents into a small glass. As he raised his head to take the brandy from the maid's hand he glanced upward at a picture hanging over the mantel.

"That's Mis' Lalock," Candace informed him. "D'yuh reckon whut Mis' Button said to-day was true about him hirin' that white trash to kill her?"

"I don't know. Get Mrs. Button's bed ready. I think she'll be better with her clothes off."

"Yes, sah."

When Candace had gone, he forced some of the brandy between the old woman's set teeth—teeth that were curiously white and even. Then he walked about, examining the room. He spaced the distance between fireplace and table, crossed to the windows, lifted the curtains, and dropped them again. They hung unevenly, with some little space between them. A bullet need not necessarily have touched them in coming in at the window. He looked out into the garden, noting the trees that shaded it and the tall hedge that shut it off from the street beyond. A man could easily have stood close to the window and fired the fatal shot without being seen.

Going into the hallway, he looked up and down the corridor. In the middle of it was a winding staircase. Almost opposite, through an open door, he saw the dining room. The corridor led past this to another door, which opened into the kitchen. Beyond the kitchen was a small foyer, with another stairway, narrow and steep.

Bradley now returned to the corridor and entered the dining room. A veranda, which he had seen from the front of the house, extended the whole length of this room, and there was a door which gave access to it. The door was latched with a hook, but he unfastened it and stepped outside.

There were no steps, but the porch sloped down to a beaten path sheltered by a thick bushy hedge. Bradley followed the path as far as the front door, where it ended abruptly in a gravel walk that ran to the gate. In the other direction, toward the back of the house, was a line of rose bushes growing so close together that he had difficulty in pushing his way through them. A thorn caught his coat and tore a jagged piece before he could extricate himself. The rose bushes were joined by the hedge just below the library window.

What a screen! Standing at this point, the murderer would be effectually protected from view. It was easy to see how, even in broad daylight, the crime had been committed without fear of detection.

Bradley paused to examine the hedge and the soft ground underneath it. Then he pushed his way back. Halfway he gave a low whistle and bent swiftly. Dangling upon one of the rose bushes was a bit of cloth torn from a garment. He jerked it off and put it into his pocket.

That piece of dark cloth might be

the key to unlock Ronald Standish's prison cell.

Candace was in the library when he returned.

"I thought you-all had left," she said. "I was wonderin' how I'd evah git her upstairs by mahse'f. Ah reckon she's comin' to, though. She's been mutterin' a lot."

Bradley leaned over the divan. The recumbent woman moved her body and moaned.

"Are you in pain, Mrs. Button?"

Her opaque eyes opened and met his. With an inarticulate cry she struggled to a half sitting posture and then dropped back again.

"I'm going to take you upstairs," he said.

She recoiled a little when he started to lift her, but then she lay very still. He carried her gently up the stairs, Candace following.

"Undress her," he said to the colored girl. "Then call me. I'll be downstairs."

In the library he stood with folded arms and studied the portrait of Lalock's wife. His black brows were knitted. When Candace called him he moved slowly, as if in a dream. In his hand was a bit of drab cloth—the fragment that he had taken from the thorn on the rose bush.

The woman was quite conscious when he entered. Her face expressed no curiosity when he drew a chair beside the bed and sat down, nor did it change in expression when he said quietly:

"Mrs. Lalock, what did you do with the gun after you shot your husband?"

TWO o'clock again. The courtroom was crowded. Dinner dishes had been left unwashed, shops had been closed, while housewives, clerks, schoolboys, and schoolgirls thronged to the drama. All Roan City was present, full of excitement—all except Asa Blaine, who was still missing.

One person had seen him running up the railroad track, another had watched him boarding a train. Some one had seen him on Milt Stevens's bicycle, headed for Roan Mountain. Various information was given, and no two stories were the same. The box car had been searched, the pool rooms had been visited, but Asa himself could not be found. In some unaccountable fashion the man who many years ago had escaped from prison and become a fugitive had again evaded the law.

Dr. Wren, more pompous and important than before, called every one to order.

"It's a farce," Agatha whispered to Armitage. "Why not release Ronnie and Mittie now?"

The first testimony concerned Asa Blaine. The two prisoners sat tensely in their places, the girl's hand clasped in Ronald's, but they seemed to be forgotten. Apparently it mattered little to the sheriff or to the coroner that they were together, or that they proclaimed their love to all present.

"Mrs. Button!" Dr. Wren called.

There was no response.

"Mrs. Button! Merwin, go get Mrs. Button!"

Before the policeman could reach the door Grant Bradley walked in. Something in his manner and in the set of his square shoulders drew the attention of the spectators. He walked briskly up the aisle to the coroner, and, leaning forward, whispered to him. Dr. Wren gave a perceptible start. He spoke in an undertone to the lawyer. There were more whispers, and then the coroner said aloud:

"Ladies and gentlemen, this court is adjourned. Mr. Bradley, the counsel for the defense, has proved beyond a doubt the innocence of the prisoners. He has secured a signed confession from the person who murdered Leonard Lalock!"

Dr. Wren paused, weighing the effect of his words. The buzz that went through the courtroom was music to his ears. When it had subsided a little he said in a loud voice:

"Merwin, go out to Lalock's house and put Mrs. Lalock, *alias* Mrs. Button, under arrest for the murder of her husband."

What he said to Ronald and Mittie was not heard by any one else. Probably all that the young people understood was that they were free.

THE housekeeper's confession appeared in the Roan City *News*, and was the sensation of the county. It was almost incredible that the woman whom for twelve years they had believed dead should have had lived among them, unrecognized, for five years.

It was not a pretty story, though infinitely pitiful. A young woman, full of life and spirit, she had entered the forest and had awakened in her tent, in the dead of night, to find herself surrounded by a blazing conflagration. A less spirited woman would never have escaped, but with rare presence of mind she had wrapped herself in wet blankets and resolved to fight her way through the flames. After a desperate struggle she had escaped on the other side of the mountain, with her luxurious hair, eyebrows, and lashes gone, and her face scorched beyond recognition.

Fatigue and pain caused her to stumble, and she fell into a ravine. The fall injured her spine, and gave her her misshapen body. Several days later she was discovered, unconscious, by strangers, and was taken in a car to a hospital in Asheville. There she lay for months between life and death, in a plaster cast, with no one aware of her identity.

When she recovered, her first thought was of her husband, whom she adored; but one look in the mirror, and she shuddered at meeting him. Death was preferable.

She pretended to be without relatives, and went East. There she tried, with the assistance of surgeons, to patch up her destroyed beauty; but the result was that her face became an expressionless mask, with every feature changed. Hair whitened by horror and eyes glazed by the scorching fire completed her disguise.

For years she fought off her desire to see the man she loved; but at length the yearning grew stronger than her will, and she returned to Roan City, to learn how Lalock had profited by her death. She seized the right opportunity to apply for a position as his housekeeper, and secured it. For five years, loving him, hiding her identity, she served him faithfully, content so long as he married no one else, a living shadow in the home where once she had been mistress.

Then the woman who had brooded so long over her wrongs, who had suffered untold physical pain, overheard the conversation between Lalock and Asa Blaine that night in the library, and learned that the man whom she had loved all these years, who had inherited her wealth, whom she had spared the misery of knowing that she was his wife, had been the instrument of her destruction.

In that hour her poor feeble, tor-

tured brain became unbalanced. As if in compensation, however, a cunning was born in her—a cunning that suggested the use of a pistol; that prompted her to steal and secrete a revolver which Lalock had kept in his garage; that showed her where one could stand at the library window, unseen, and fire at short range upon a man by the table.

Her reason?

Lalock's marriage, and the presence of Mittie in the house, goaded her to her final outburst. Whether she wished to protect Ronald when she stood at the library window and fired the fatal shot, or whether she wished to save the girl, no one ever learned, for she refused to say. After a few days of senseless babbling, the authorities realized that it was useless to try to question her further. With her denunciation of the man implicated with Lalock, her last remnant of sanity had disappeared.

Shortly after they removed her to an institution, she closed her eyes, folded her poor gnarled hands, and went to sleep, never to waken.

No one in Roan City ever saw Asa Blaine again, and no one but Mittie ever heard of him. Several months after she and Ronald were married and established in an apartment on Park Avenue, Mittie received a letter forwarded from the Summit House, with a British stamp on the envelope. It was brief. She read it and destroyed it, and, though she smiled a little wistfully afterward, she did not tell Ronald of its contents, which were as follows:

LITTLE GRANDDAUGHTER:

In case you wonder what has become of me, I want you to know I am well and safe. On the day of the inquest, when I escaped from the courthouse, I went down to the creek, found a rowboat, and rowed off down the river. Later I made my way to Savannah, tramping mostly, jumping a freight now and then. At Savannah I shipped as fireman on a steamer bound for England, where I am now living. Perhaps I shall never be recognized, so that I can retain my freedom during my few remaining years, I hope so.

Mittie, child, I told the truth that day. You are no kin of mine. You have no need to blush for your parentage; but, as God is my judge, I never knowingly took human life. I've been an embezzler and a drunkard, but not a murderer. That crime belongs to Lalock.

I would give my life to undo the wrong I've done, and I want you to believe me. For this once I will sign myself,

YOUR LOVING GRANDFATHER.

For three long years Ronald kept detectives searching for living relatives of his wife. Notices were inserted in newspapers, every possible lead was followed, and one day the seekers' efforts were rewarded. An uncle living in California wrote that Mittie's father and mother had been motoring in the East, and had visited North Carolina with their little daughter. Mr. Reynolds had read of the fire, and, after trying in vain to hear anything of his brother, had at last decided that the whole family had met their death. He was a lawyer, fairly well to do, and a bachelor.

Later, when he came to New York and made the acquaintance of his niece, Mittie learned that her father had been a doctor, and her mother an orphaned school-teacher before her marriage.

The cloud being lifted from her heritage, her happiness was complete.

THE END.

"Come here and kiss the man you're going to marry—and love it!"

Broadcasting Love

Love called a little English girl across the Atlantic—to find her lover vanished!

By Thomas Edgelow

"I DON'T think it's awfully hospitable of you, Susanne." Ronald Locke sighed as he sat with Susanne, who was almost too pretty to be believed, under the chestnut trees at the end of the green-velvet patch that the English call a lawn.

The girl sighed back, a sigh fraught with happiness and love and sorrow and delight, all mixed up together in one medley of rapture, and let her eyes rest on the boy's eager face. How good-looking he was, with that well-bred, charming insolence that somehow became humble before her beauty! How his voice and his smile, and his little tricks and mannerisms of speech secretly delighted her! How she admired the out-of-doorness of him, and his strong shoulders, sun-browned skin and the blue that generally is to be found only in the eyes of a sailor!

"What isn't hospitable of me?" she laughed. "We're only poor English clergy here, as you know, but how have we failed to entertain our American guest? Ice water has been lacking, I admit, and—"

"Not very hospitable," he interrupted. "Hardly kind! So to tease a guest, a poor, lone American, miles and miles away from Chicago! I refer,

my good girl," he went on, with those blue eyes crinkling in the way that so fascinated her, "not to the lack of ice water, but to your deliberately torturing me with that dimple of yours that lies entrancingly to the southeast of the prettiest mouth in the County of Devon, in England, the United States, China and Mars! That's what I call lack of hospitality, and as they can't see us from the terrace, and as your father is writing his sermon for next Sunday, and as you are a darling, come here quick and be kissed by the man you are going to marry—and love it!"

He took her firmly in his arms. Susanne, engaged but an hour ago, closed her eyes and knew the thrill of his kisses, loved him as she thrilled and lived for that moment in all the ecstasy that Love alone can give!

"Darling, I will try," Ronald whispered as he released her. "I know—I've told you—how—how sort of wild and mad I have been, but that was because I didn't care. Mother dying when I was a kid sort of left me alone. Dad's a grand old sport, but he's a very, very busy man, and though he has simply heaped money on me, I've been—oh, at a loose end, a ship without a rudder, until I found safe anchorage in the sweetness and the beauty and the general darlingness that is you! But I'll settle down now and go to work in the old man's office and work like eight horses and seven elephants!"

"But your father?" Susanne asked, half fearfully. "Will he be exactly pleased at your getting engaged? Don't—forgive me, dear, if I sound horrid—but don't very, very rich men always want their sons to marry rich girls? What will he say when you tell him that you want to marry a poor English parson's daughter?"

"First," the boy laughed, "he will be enchanted at the prodigal son act I'll put on. The wild, only child reformed at last! He will even forgive the slight mistake I made by riding a mule into the dear old dean's study, and being requested to complete my education elsewhere in consequence. Then you forget that I should never have met you and so have missed heaven, if my old man and yours hadn't been pals a hundred years ago or something, so that dad gave me a letter to your father. Lastly, you forget what I am going to say to him!"

"Which is?" Susanne asked, a smile of tenderness on her lips as she noted his eager tone, his adoring expression.

"That he should be the happiest parent in America," Ronald went on. "He spends hundreds of thousands on old pictures, and excuses his extravagance by saying he worships beauty. 'See here,' I'm going to say to him, 'I'm bringing so much beauty into this homely family that you're going to sit up and gasp, dad! Susanne is so lovely, with her blue-green eyes and her black, black hair, her flower face that—well, there are no words. You're going to shout your son is a lucky fellow!' That's what I'm going to tell the old man, and then I'm going to try to make him understand just what a darling you are, apart from your beauty. So don't worry about Henry T. Locke! He's just going to be crazy with delight at his son's unbelievable good luck!"

Then silence between them, as the sun sank behind some hills, and presently, still quiet for very tenderness, hand in hand they strolled to the gray stone old vicarage and found the vicar of Little Detton in his library.

Ronald, a little more embarrassed than he would have had Susanne know,

blurted out their story and ended up with: "So we do hope—that is, we hope—you will give your consent, sir. I'm sailing on the *Berengaria* the day after to-morrow to tell my father all about Susanne—that is, if I could only do her justice, sir."

Susanne's father's eye twinkled as he surveyed the young couple. "My consent really doesn't matter much, does it?" he asked dryly. "Still, you have it, my boy, but only if your own father gives his consent. I know Harry pretty well, and I don't think he'll put up any obstacle, other than certain stories that have come to me, Ronald. Stories of—er—riding mules into university deans' studies! There, don't look so guilty! If you love my little girl, as I am sure you do, that will make you settle down and work to make her happy."

SUSANNE never found two weeks pass more slowly than those following the departure of her lover for his home. Even his daily radio, and later his daily cable, the extravagance of which entirely upset the morale of the local telegraph office, hardly made up for the anxiety of waiting until she could hear his father's answer. One cable from Chicago partly reassured her, just as she was contemplating what it would mean to wait two, three, perhaps five years for her lover, for of course they would never give each other up, whatever old Mr. Locke might say. The cable read:

> Old man seems impressed with future daughter-in-law more than with own son Stop Have no definite decision from him yet but he says he has written to you and that I had better go to work Stop Have gone to work like mad in his office and expect a smile from the darlingest lips in the world as a reward Stop Forgot to mention I love you love you
>
> RONALD

But at last the elder Locke's letter, in a precise, rather old-world handwriting, arrived. In it, most warmly, Henry T. Locke, whose name was a power in the financial world, welcomed the daughter of his old friend into his family, and hoped that her influence might steady his boy.

"There is nothing dishonorable, vicious or mean about Ronald," his father had written. "It is simply he was born with more than his share of the devil in him! He has always been playing wild tricks on his friends and his professors, though all his faults I am glad to say have been caused by a superabundance of high spirits. Ronald would think nothing—in the past, I hope—of leaving a pet monkey in his maiden aunt's room when she comes to visit us; of keeping a fellow from his wedding, so that he turned up half an hour late in church; of driving at a hundred miles an hour when the law called for thirty—but I think his fresh responsibilities have calmed the young ruffian down a bit. At least, he has gone to work in my office, which is something quite new, and for that reason I ask you to waive convention and consent to be married over here in my home, as now the boy has started keeping regular hours, I hate to take him away from routine."

So, a few weeks after this Susanne sailed for New York, where Ronald was to meet her and escort her to an aunt, who would chaperon her on her journey to Chicago.

The old vicar had managed to provide the steamship ticket, which, added to a modest trousseau, had almost broken him financially.

"You have five pounds—twenty-five American dollars—in your purse, Susanne, my dear," he had remarked. "That will be ample for tips and incidental expenses. And here is a letter of credit on New York for a further hundred dollars. I am sure you will lack nothing!"

Susanne's mother, who was an invalid, had added another three pounds to the slender hoard, but the least of the girl's troubles were worldly ones. She was, of course, going to marry one of America's richest young men; but that meant nothing. Had he been poor she would have been just as happy. All her thoughts were on—speed! Every revolution of the huge ship's propellers brought her nearer to her loved one; every morning, when the previous day's run was posted, Susanne was an eager spectator to find out just how many weary sea miles lay between her and Ronald's welcoming smile.

She pictured their meeting. As she lay in her narrow bed at night she would go over every detail. Ronald would meet her as the ship docked, and his eyes would have the crinkly smile that she loved so much! He would come eagerly to her and lead her aside. Their reunion kiss would be too sacred to be given in public. Then his lips would touch hers in rapture, while his gay voice, now tender more than gay, would tell her how he loved her, loved her, his—what had he called her?—his "wild English rose." It was all going to be very sweet, and very wonderful.

Then Ronald would take her to his aunt's house, but perhaps they could slip away alone together after dinner and go to a theater, or, far better, have a long, intimate talk together, making plans for the life that lay ahead. It was all going to be very sweet and dear and young, and no cloud could ever mar their happiness.

The much-advertised New York skyline meant nothing more to her than a sign that before long she would be looking into Ronald's eyes. The Bay of Naples, the famed beauty of Capri, would have met with the same reception from Susanne! She wanted only Ronald, Ronald with his smile and his blue eyes, Ronald with his out-of-doorness and his sun-browned face!

AND at last, at long, long last, she was looking into his eyes and they were *crinkling* in that smile! At last he stood bareheaded before her, looking down on her from his height, his hands holding hers.

But at that same second of joy, she sensed something was wrong. Ronald, charming as ever, dear, and even dearer to her than ever before, was embarrassed about something.

"You look—oh, different," he began, when he was interrupted by four boys of about his own age, who began to shout in unison:

"We—want—to—be—intro-duced! We—want—to—be—intro-duced!"

One boy, a dark, good-looking fellow, began to sing the same words in a rich barytone! Many peope on deck, making their way to the gangplank, stopped to smile at such youthful good spirits.

"They would come with me," Ronald said ruefully. "Beery Bill—that's Mr. Grant de Witt—permit me to present him—my *fiancée*, Miss Halsey." Ronald introduced the boy who was singing. "He has a drag with this line, which is how we all got on board; otherwise," he went on indignantly, "none of them would ever have come with me. But forgive these savages, Susanne, and let me present all of

them! The short fat one here, with a face like a clam, is George Williams."

Mr. Williams bowed formally and said: "We were all so sorry for you, Miss Halsey, for taking on Ronald, that we called as a committee of four to offer our condolences."

Mr. Russell Van Nettin, a short, red-haired boy, and Mr. Joe Parker were also presented, and a volley of chaff was kept up. It was, Susanne reflected, all very gay and jolly, but it was not what she had anticipated. She had expected to be all alone with Ronald in that moment of reunion. Besides, she was wondering what he had meant by saying she looked "different"! How *different?* Did she seem less alluring than before? And she had taken such pains to be dressed to please him in a cool little linen frock of Nile green with an adorable white Panama hat, in which she felt able to cope with the heat of New York, of which she had heard so much.

But she must be a good sport about it, so she forced herself to laugh and chatter though she was inwardly terribly disappointed.

Ronald attended to everything. Susanne handed over her keys and the customs were made easy for her. Her trunks were sent away by express, she was told, and with only her hand bag, she was soon permitted to leave the pier.

Ronald walked with her to the elevator in which they descended to the street, but they were surrounded by the four boys who never left them alone for a second. Two taxicabs were awaiting them. Ronald handed Susanne into one of the cars, and the boys crowded around the door to say goodby.

"Take our advice—we know him," remarked the red-headed boy. "Save divorce fees later on and just don't marry him!"

"Pick a good-looking fellow like me," urged Mr. Williams.

"Beat it—all of you!" Ronald growled good-naturedly, but Susanne knew he was unhappy about something.

"One second, old man," Grant called to him, and led Ronald aside.

Looking back through the window at the rear of the taxi, Susanne saw Ronald enter the second taxi, saw the door slam, saw the cab start up, turn and disappear in the traffic!

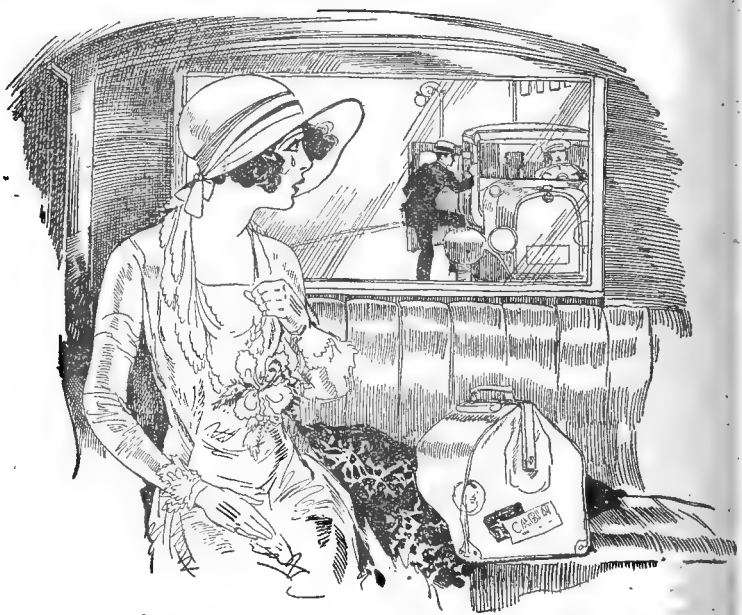
She sat dumfounded. The shock was too great at first for any great heartache. Gradually, as she sat there motionless, two perfectly gloved hands folded on her lap, realization came upon her. Ronald had deserted her. He—he did not love her any more! Ronald! Her Ronald had tired of her! Why, yes, he had! Yes, he had! He had said she "looked different"! Which must have meant he thought her hideous and dowdy and awful! Susanne wished she were dead! She wished she were back home in the Devonshire vicarge, wished she were anywhere but sitting there in that taxicab all alone in this vast New York.

The next second, after the first heart stab, the first realization of her loss, she became aware of a number of other disagreeable facts. Ronald had taken her trunks and sent them off somewhere. And foolishly she had left her letter of credit in one of them. Feverishly she counted the money in her purse, and found that she had rather less than sixteen dollars in the world. And there was that taxi-meter clicking out nickels!

Susanne called to the driver, who came around and opened the door. She explained to that hard-boiled New

Yorker that she was almost without funds for the moment, and please, did he know of any cheap rooms somewhere? He remarked that it sure was tough, but melting somewhat at the sight of the pretty face in distress, he drove her away and presently deposited her at the door of a moderately priced rooming house on West Nineteenth Street, where the hard-boiled one refused to take a penny for his clock and drove away muttering, "Geeze, it soitinly is tough!"

Susanne, being entirely inexperienced of the world and bitterly unhappy besides, broke down and wept in Miss Mather's arms, and then proceeded to relate all that had happened, suppressing only the name of her betrayer.



Without another look, he climbed into the waiting taxi!

A FEW minutes later the girl was in conference with one Miss Emily Mather, an old maid of fifty odd winters, who rented rooms and distrusted all men under eighty.

Meanwhile, Miss Mather showed Susanne a room that generally rented for eight dollars a week, a horrid, dark little room on the ground floor, looking up at the next door's back fence. Finding that Susanne knew nothing at all about the price of New York rooms, at first Miss Mather decided to ask her ten dollars a week, but there was that about the girl that had made the taxi-driver refuse his fare, and that same something made a curious

lump appear in Emily Mather's withered throat, so that she remarked testily:

"I generally rent this room for five dollars a week, but as it is the summer, you may have it for four." Immediately afterward she wondered why she had been so soft!

"You don't even know the name of this young fellow's aunt, where you were supposed to stay?" Miss Mather demanded.

Susanne shook her head. "Even if I did I wouldn't go there!" she flashed. "Wild horses won't make me get in touch with him or his father. Why, Miss Mather, how could I? You wouldn't yourself, you know!"

This was the signal for Miss Mather to enter into a very detailed account of her own solitary romance, that had occurred in the early years of the present century, the telling of which took no less than forty-eight minutes.

"And I never have regretted him," Miss Mather said, so sharply that Susanne wondered at quite so much vehemence, "though it still hurts, if I let myself think about him."

At last she went out of the room, leaving Susanne to her thoughts.

Such unhappy thoughts they were, too! Tears would somehow brim in those eyes that, so long, so long ago Ronald had said were blue and green and altogether darling! What could she do? Pride, she knew, would prevent her from returning home. Home? How could she? All the old village gossips would be talking, talking. No, whatever happened, she must remain in New York, get a job somehow, become independent. But all these were just practical things, none of which really mattered.

Nothing mattered except that Love was dead! How could he hurt her so, Susanne demanded, as she threw herself on the outside of the rather grimy cot? Why had he to come into her life at all, if just to bring such loneliness and desolation upon her? And her pride was hurt. She—she wasn't pretty any more! She couldn't be, or Ronald would never have done what he had—taken one look at her and simply run away to avoid marrying her!

Pride, in the end, helped Susanne more than a little. She would waste no more tears on a man who felt that way about her, in proof of which she began to weep again as though she never could be comforted.

But presently she did dry her eyes and powder her nose, and when Miss Mather came to her door with a cup of coffee and some cake, Susanne pretended to be resigned and cheerful.

"Of course," Miss Mather gloomed, "you will have to find a position right away. A pretty girl like you ought to have no difficulty at all. Why, you might get a nice job as a saleslady, only you haven't had any experience. Or you might get some newspaper to take an interest in you. You know—headlines! 'Bride Deserted on Meeting Groom.'"

"Oh, please don't!" Susanne shuddered. "Oh, that would be awful!"

"I'd like it if it was me," Miss Mather decided. "Show that fellow up—not that they aren't all the same. I'd sue him for breach of promise, I would—'Heart Balm,' as the tabloids call it to-day. Why, you might get quite a bit out of it!"

Susanne succeeded in getting the landlady's mind away from this project by deciding to go out for a walk and perhaps begin looking for a job.

"There's always dishwashing,"

Miss Mather called cheerfully as the girl started down the street.

BUT walking only made matters worse for Susanne. Twice she caught sight of a smart touring car driven by a boy who reminded her of Ronald. As though she needed any reminder. She wondered if life would always be like that! Would it consist of one heartache after another? Did time heal everything, as older people always said it did? On that sweltering afternoon it did not seem that she could ever feel anything again but that same aching sense of loss.

In this same mood she traced her way back to the house and went to her room. She took off her dress, wondering what she would do for a fresh one, as even her small wardrobe had been taken away from her. She lay down on the bed and presently fell into a troubled slumber.

In it she dreamed of Ronald. He was sitting again by her side on the vicarage lawn, and he was telling her that he loved her so—loved her too deeply for mere words to express.

Then the dream changed, and she had fallen overboard from the ship in which she was coming to join him. It was night, and the ship's lights could be seen disappearing in the distance, as she battled with the waves. The New York taxi-driver had become the captain, and he was shouting out that she must pay her fare before he would lower a boat, and she had no money with her in the water!

Then some one was knocking, knocking on the side of the ship, and Susanne was awake, and there was some one knocking on her door.

"One minute, please!" she called, getting up quickly and putting on her dress.

On opening the door she found Miss Mather standing outside, with her hand pressed to her heart.

"Oh, I'm all of a twitter!" the older woman said, and then requested to be knocked down with a feather.

"Why, what's happened?" the girl asked, noting that it was nearly dark; she must have been asleep for some hours.

"The radio is what's happened," Miss Mather clearly elucidated, "which made me come all queer all over like. And why didn't you tell me it was Ronald Locke, who's the fourth or fifth richest bachelor in the world?"

"What has Ronald's father's wealth got to do with the radio?" Susanne asked, somewhat tersely.

"Why, they was announcing about you!" Miss Mather went on. "The announcer had just been saying that the Twilight Soap Orchestra would play by request a special number, when he broke off and then said that Ronald Locke had missed his *fiancée* at the dock this morning, and would explain all if Miss Halsey, or whoever knew where she was, would kindly telephone to a Plaza number. So, naturally, I telephoned, and your young man is half crazy with grief and is dashing down here as quick as he can get here—and—"

But Susanne waited to hear no more. Ronald wanted her! It was all some mistake! He had been crazy with grief, just as she had been!

She retreated into her room and made what preparations she could with the help of her vanity case and a tiny flow of cold water in the small basin.

But she was ready, radiantly ready, when a little later she heard the house-bell ring, and then his voice—his voice!—anxiously asking Miss Mather for her.

Ignoring the presence of the keenly interested landlady, Ronald took Susanne straight into his arms. She snuggled close to him, willing to let all explanations wait.

"We can't talk here," he whispered. "Come, my darling! My aunt's car is outside."

He fumbled with a bill-fold. "My very, very grateful thanks," he was saying to the woman, "and please don't be offended if I say 'thank you' this way." By Miss Mather's smile as she clutched the extravagantly large bill it might be judged that she was not in the least offended.

OUTSIDE, Ronald handed Susanne into a smartly chauffeured limousine, and as the car glided away, headed toward Park Avenue, he took her again in his arms.

"My darling, how I have suffered at the loss of you!" he whispered. "Every minute has been—well, unspeakable! You see, at Joe Parker's wedding, with some other fellows, we kept him from the church, and he and the others at the pier this morning framed me to get even. They called me into that cab on the excuse that there was some trouble with the customs, and they wanted to explain it, and then they held me down by main force, though I fought like a wild cat, and drove me away uptown and kept on going. I finally got free of them forty minutes later, and found myself 'way up in the Bronx. Since then I've been rushing to detectives and walking the streets like a madman. When the boys saw what a state I was in, and when they realized what they had done, as you are a stranger here, they were as sorry as could be, and it was Russell Van Nettin who thought of trying to find you by the radio! And you, heart of my heart, what you must have gone through!"

But Susanne was weeping! They were tears of relief and tears of happiness, but also they were tears of memory of recent suffering.

"I thought," she sobbed; "I thought you had stopped loving me because I looked awful, or dowdy or something. Because you said—you said I looked different!"

He held her close, close to him. He did not answer at once, but his lips knew the rapture of her mouth; his hands held hers as though they could never, never let her go.

"I know I did," he explained. "You did look different. I had, my darling, imagined you were lovely, exquisite, but when I saw you again you were better than my memories. I was just going to tell you, when those hoodlums came butting in on us, that you were really far, far more lovely than even I remembered. My aunt will come home with us, and then—soon—you are going to be mine altogether, for all time, you and your loveliness. Only tell me you forgive me for this morning—just tell me that!"

And she told him of her complete and absolute forgiveness, not by words, but by kisses.

As the door closed behind the others, he drew her fiercely close

More Precious Than Jewels

Out of the crowd his mystery girl came to him bringing great love, but also great suffering. Who was she?

By Kennis Gorman

HUGH saw her rushing toward him where he sat in his parked car at the curb, but he could scarcely credit his senses when she pulled open the door of his roadster and collapsed into the seat beside him.

"Drive on!" she gasped. "Don't stop to ask questions—just drive on!"

The man, staring, managed to blurt out: "But, my dear girl—"

She gazed at him, agonized. "Please—please!" she implored in a

frenzy. "Don't ask questions! Just drive on!"

Hugh, used to quick decisions, took one look into the face raised so imploringly, and without further ado touched the starter.

For a second his breath ceased to come. There was something wrong with the ignition; he had noticed it the day before. Would the fool engine start? Why on earth hadn't he attended to it yesterday? Then a welcome whir told him the spark had caught; the motor changed from a purr to a roar.

He looked ahead. Front and rear he was wedged in by parked cars, with scarcely a foot of space in either direction.

The girl moaned: "Hurry! Oh, hurry!"

He backed, crashing recklessly into the car behind; then, with a lightning-like change in gears, jolted into the car ahead. Back again, the perspiration standing on his forehead now, then forward, taking advantage of the space he had gained. Would he make it? He cursed the traffic problem, the parking regulations, the police force, everything and anything.

The girl was crouched down in her seat, but she twisted about, peered at the bumper on the side on which she sat. "Easy!" she breathed; then, as he slid out she sank back. "You'll make it!" she exulted, with a deep sigh.

"And now?" he asked.

"Up Fifth Avenue. Then over to Lexington. Then back to Seventh."

She sat tense and alert as he turned into the orderly congestion of Fifth Avenue. He dared not take his eyes from the road ahead, but he was acutely aware of her unwavering gaze upon him.

Suddenly he sent her a swift, quizzical smile. "Now that you've picked me out, do you like me?"

Her voice told him she was smiling slightly, too, as she answered after a pause: "Yes, I rather think I do, Mr. —Mr. Man."

He whirled with expert ease around a lumbering bus. "Mr. Conger," he corrected. "Mr. Hugh Conger."

She was silent, her eye on his face. Then, in a peculiar tone: "Of the New York Congers. And Miami. And Northampton."

He laughed soundlessly. "And more recently of Panama City, Panama! And now that you know who's chauffeuring you," he went on, his fine face growing boyish as his rather stern muscles relaxed, "mightn't you tell me who you are?"

"Look out for that car!" she warned. Then, as he deftly avoided the danger, she added, "Now cut over into Seventh.

He obeyed, observing: "We used to do these snake dances in the university. They're jolly—but a bit hard on the nerves," he added as a cursing truck driver grazed their mudguard.

"I'm sorry," she said contritely. "But we'll soon be out of it."

OVER in the Drive the congestion was less and he had an opportunity to study his passenger. He noticed that her fingers were nervously closing and opening on the handle of a small black bag she carried. Golden ringlets of glossy hair, blown by the wind, had escaped from beneath her tight red hat and he wondered—those eyes shaded now by heavy fringe of black lashes. He wanted desperately, somehow, to peep to be sure of their color. At that precise moment she raised her lashes and looked at him.

He breathed a deep, satisfied breath. "Ah," he sighed contentedly, "they are!"

The eyes widened. Her red lips parted, like the dewy petals of an opening rose.

"What," said she, "are you talking about?"

"Your eyes," he confessed, grinning a little sheepishly. "They *are* black." Then at her gasp, he added, meekly: "I so wanted them to be. Ever since I can remember I promised myself never to marry. But," he added, as she showed indication of laughter, "if I *did* succumb, it would be only to a girl with black eyes."

The black eyes twinkled on him now, and small white teeth sparkled in the sun. "And you are Hugh Conger—the man who runs from girls as from a plague!"

"But not," he qualified, "from girls with black eyes!"

"Really, my dear Hugh," a voice interrupted their mirth, "don't you think it — er — wise to look where you're going? I've been trailing you for three blocks and you've passed a red light, driven one limousine over into the curb and removed a yard of paint from another."

The speaker, a dark-haired woman, was smiling at them from a little town car, stopped, like Hugh's, by the red light.

"Why, Eleanor, I had no idea you were in town to-day," he exclaimed. Then, hastily: "I want you to meet Miss—Miss—" His face grew red as he glanced down at the girl beside him. His smile faded as he saw her white cheeks and frightened eyes. "Why, what's the matter?" he asked quickly. "You aren't ill?"

She shook her head, her lips slowly regaining their color. "I was startled at being spoken to so suddenly, that was all," she answered. "I'm quite all right."

Hugh, remembering the proprieties, offered: "My sister, Mrs. Winters. Her husband is the importer, jewels, you know." Then, as Eleanor Winters's smiling blue eyes were on him, he grew flustered, remembering that he did not as yet know the name of his passenger. He mumbled, "I—ah—Miss—" He gazed appealingly at the girl.

After a pause she said slowly, "Minor. Miss Minor."

Hugh wiped his perspiring brow. "I can never remember your last name. The stupidest thing—"

His hurried speech was interrupted by a delighted sound from his sister. Her eyes were lit up with pleasure as she regarded the girl.

"Eunice Minor! I've read about you so often in the papers," she confided. Then, with a chiding glance at her brother, "Why, Hugh, you selfish thing, keeping Miss Minor to yourself! But"—she paused, and her blue eyes went from the girl to her brother—"I had no idea you knew each other! Where did you meet? Hugh just got in Tuesday from that job he insists on holding down in Panama, and"—she looked at the girl—"I read only last week that you were sailing for Europe."

"I changed my mind," the girl said in a choked voice.

Hugh was getting red again. "I—we—that is, I ran into Miss Minor on Forty-Second Street," he said evasively.

Eleanor leaned closer. "But now that we've met, Miss Minor," she said cordially, "you must come out with Hugh to-night. Oh," she interrupted herself as the girl squirmed on her seat, "it's just a few friends, dancing,

bridge you know. I won't take no," she added decidedly.

HUGH bridled, intensely satisfied with the way things were going. He had been wondering what he could do to detain the girl at his side. He wanted to hear again the low, throaty music of her voice, to see her rare smile break out like the fleeting sunlight of an April day.

He looked down at her and, seeing her lips forming denials, he said quickly, "And if you think Eleanor hasn't a will of her own, you're mistaken! She'll have you to-night if she has to commit mayhem and abduction to get you. There's no use saying no. And besides," and now all the banter was gone from his face, and his eyes were pleading, humble, "besides, I want you to come!"

The girl looked haunted. "But," she expostulated, "my clothes"—she indicated her smart little tailored frock—"I couldn't—"

Mrs. Winters waved that aside with a casual hand. "You look utterly adorable." She turned to her brother. "Doesn't she, Hugh?"

"She does indeed," he answered with more ardor than was exactly called for. So much, indeed, that Eunice Minor went a lovely rose.

"But—but—" she was murmuring when Eleanor Winters closed the subject with a satisfied air.

"Then that's settled!" She looked ahead. The red light was still against them. "Oh, by the way, when you were on Forty-Second Street did you notice any excitement?" She looked curiously from Hugh to the girl. "Carl's store was robbed. I got there just in the midst of the uproar after the holdup men had escaped."

"Carl's store robbed!" gasped Hugh. "Why, I was sitting before the place not fifteen minutes ago! How—" he stopped, in utter amazement.

Eleanor shrugged. "It was robbed just the same. Broad daylight. Three men and—think of it—a girl. The girl ran out first with the jewels in a black bag, her companions rushed out after her, but she had driven off in a roadster with another man."

Hugh gasped again and she went on, "Carl wasn't there. He drove down with me, and the men haven't checked up yet. But they estimate the robbers got away with about one hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth of loose stones, diamonds mostly, and emeralds. The police are trying to trace the car in which the girl escaped. The men disappeared in the crowd."

"Well, of all the—" Hugh interrupted his own ejaculation to add, "A girl, you say?"

Eleanor nodded. "There's the green," she said. "I'm off. Until to-night." She waved a smiling good-by and sped ahead.

Hugh seemed unable to forget the story she had told.

"Can you beat that?" he exploded as he followed her. "Robbing a store in broad daylight! And me sitting not ten feet from the place! And a girl—" He paused, struck by the strange silence of his passenger. She had made no comment on the news of the daring holdup.

He looked down at her and saw that she was deathly white. He opened his lips to speak when sharply she cautioned: "Careful. Turn here and then we'll have free sailing."

As she said it she drew a deep sigh as if from relief, and then her whole body drooped down in her seat.

"You're tired," he said pityingly. "And I'll bet you haven't had a bite to

eat except a chocolate éclair for lunch," he added.

She raised her amazingly long lashes and he was looking once more into the lustrous depths of her dark eyes.

"You're so terribly kind," she said shakily, and tears were near the surface. "I *am* hungry. You see"—she smiled wanly—"I didn't even bother to have an éclair!"

"We'll pull up at the first likely place," he told her.

THEY were silent then, until at length he turned into a curving driveway that led to a rambling green building with orange-colored awnings. *The Green Window,* read a sign swinging over the entrance.

Soon she was sitting opposite him, and he could fill his eyes with the details for which he had not had opportunity before. Her clothes were in excellent taste, her hands small and well cared for.

She, in her turn, was frankly studying him, the long, firm line of his cheek, the clear blue of his eyes, the tiny rift of his chin which softened a rather stern face. His quiet gaze returned her scrutiny and suddenly she smiled, the tired lines disappearing from her mouth.

"Do you know you're outrageously nice?" she said.

He looked pleased. "I know I'm outrageously glad you think so," he answered.

She arose. "Will you excuse me?" Her eyes were soft. "I want to freshen up a bit while you order."

"Of course!" Then he grinned: "But don't be long!"

Her fingers brushed his ever so briefly on the back of his chair as he arose with her. "I'm going to thank you—some day," she promised; then he was watching her go toward the women's rest room on the floor above, the black bag in her hand.

He dropped into his seat again, and found that his senses were whirling with a pleasurable excitement. He thought of his youth, his early maturity. He had had no time for girls. Lovely, provocative, alluring as they might be, yet they had held no attraction for him. Then he went to Panama on his first real job. There a girl had seemed even less necessary, so absorbed in his work had he been.

And now, on his first visit home in years, to meet—her. The mere touch of her fingers on his had been a new and entirely delightful thrill. He felt he could scarcely wait for her return.

Then his eyes fell on a small dark object on the table. He picked it up: it was one of her gloves. His fingers stroked the soft little thing as though it had been her hand.

He looked up suddenly, his eyes drawn by something he could not explain. From his seat he had a view of the entire lawn and his car where he had left it, and he saw the figure of Eunice Minor hurrying over the sloping sward.

He was at the door in one moment and had caught up with her in another.

"You were running away!" he accused, then flinging a bill toward the amazed waiter who was standing in the open doorway, he opened the door of the roadster and meekly enough she got in.

Neither spoke for a long time, the soft wind brushing winglike against their faces. Then, without looking at her, he said: "Eleanor is not the only one in our family who has a will of her own. Now that I've found you, did you think I'd let you escape so easily?"

She was staring sightlessly at the road ahead. "Perhaps it would have been—easier—for us both if you had let it end like that."

"Being apart from you," he said with restrained vehemence, "will never be easy for me now."

She did not reply, but she snuggled closer, and gradually her small head sank lower and lower until it rested against his shoulder. He drove on, his heart singing.

IT would be difficult to say which realized first that they were being followed. Hugh, conscious of a motor car which stubbornly kept at his rear, yet made no motion to pass him, glanced curiously into the windshield mirror.

The girl became aware of his tensity. "What is it?" she asked quickly. Then, as she saw the direction of his attention she jerked about and looked back.

"I think," he said, puzzled, "that car is following us. Though why it should—" he paused, pursing his lips.

Her voice was low and trembling. "I can't see who is in it. The sun's in my eyes."

"Two men are in it," he told her. "And—" He stopped at her low gasp.

She was suddenly cool, full of purpose. "Step on it," she commanded. "Don't let them pass!"

He stole a look at her. Her face was drawn, pale, but her lips were a straight red line. "Do you know," he began, soothingly, "I realize that you're in some sort of trouble. Won't you"—and his voice was gentle—"won't you tell me about it? Perhaps I can be a lot more help if I know just what we're fighting."

Her hand went to his on the wheel in a swift gesture of gratitude. "Oh, you're wonderful!" she breathed, her voice breaking. "But I won't impose further on your good nature. You have only to let me out here and—and go on—alone." But at the last her voice broke and tears welled up in her eyes.

Go on—alone! The words seemed to strike some deep chord of his being and set it quivering. In that moment he knew that he did not want to go on alone, ever, that as long as life lasted he would want this girl, that life without her would be unthinkable.

His answer was: "Where do you want me to take you?"

She wrung her small hands in mingled relief and distress. "Oh, I don't know," she groaned. "I don't know where to go to get away."

His expression told of a decision already reached. He sent the car leaping forward in a great burst of speed. A glance into the mirror told him the pursuing car had answered the challenge with a like rush of motion. The race was on.

They rocketed along the road, Hugh gripping the jerking wheel with hard fingers, his knuckles white, his lips compressed. The girl sat with her eyes on the climbing figures of the speedometer, her hands clutching the bag on her lap, her breath coming fast. The car behind swayed crazily from side to side as it sought to catch up with the flying roadster ahead.

Twilight fell, making the road a jungle of shadows. Hugh was compelled to switch on his lights. "Faster!" breathed the girl recklessly. "Faster!"

He gritted his teeth and plunged madly on, squeezing all the speed he dared from the racing motor. The girl was looking back.

"Oh, they're gaining," she moaned, "they're creeping up!" Then, as the car behind switched to the left of the

road, she screamed: "They're going to try to pass you!"

Hugh growled. "'Try' is right!" and with a crazy disregard for safety twisted the steering wheel. The roaring car rocked, but obeyed the wheel and blocked the pursuers' path. Hugh, laughing wildly, was enjoying the race now with all the reckless courage of his nature.

The girl managed a choked cry. "You'll wreck your car!" but he knew from her voice that all that was adventurous in her was responding to the same excitement.

Then a sharp crack split the air. Hugh stiffened. "They're shooting!" he said, with a dangerous gleam in his eyes.

"I didn't think they'd dare do that!" she gasped. "You'd better stop. You might—you might get hurt!"

"Or *they* might," he said between his teeth.

But she shook him by the arm. "Please stop! I'm afraid they'll hurt you."

FOR answer he suddenly switched off his lights and slowed down.

Darkness had by now completely fallen. The night was a black curtain, wrapping them in. He turned into a small side road almost invisible from the main highway and shut off his engine. In the sudden silence that fell they could hear the thunder of the following car.

"Quiet!" cautioned Hugh, and she saw that he was laughing. "They'll pass this road. It's just a lane and few know of it."

She sat motionless, listening, and the others roared past, unaware that the quarry was a scant few feet away.

Hugh started the engine again. "And now, forward."

"W-where are you taking me?" she quavered.

"Just where we started for—Eleanor's, of course! You can stay there as long as you like."

He could not see the gratitude in her eyes, but he heard it in her voice though she protested: "Oh, I couldn't! I cannot intrude on your kindness any farther, really!"

He spoke firmly, purposefully. "You told me you had no place to go. Eleanor will be delighted to have you, as long as you wish to stay. And so"—his mouth tightened—"we're going to Eleanor's!"

With a submissive sigh she sank back into her cushions and they drove on in silence.

After a space her voice came out of the sleepy darkness soft and golden sweet. "Do you know, you're just too terribly wonderful for words?"

The moon came out from behind a cloud at that moment and he smiled down at her in its yellow glow. "And you," he breathed, "are just too marvelous to be real!"

Then he pulled up before Eleanor Winters's door. Voices issuing from the drawing-room told them the persons inside were talking of the daring robbery.

"But haven't they any clews?" asked one. "Didn't any of the clerks get a good look at the robbers?"

Carl Winters answered. "One man's description is a good bit like another man's, you know. But the girl—it shouldn't be difficult to trace her. They said she was a blonde, yet with the most amazing dark eyes. Black, one of the clerks insisted."

At that moment Hugh and Eunice Minor stood in the doorway and Eleanor said easily: "Oh, for mercy's sake let's talk of something other than

robberies! I'll be dreaming of gunmen and missing jewels all night."

Amid the slight hubbub of getting seated at dinner Hugh was secretly exultant that Eunice was placed next

And headily he boasted: "We can do anything! To-day proves that. I look for a girl with black eyes all my life. To-day—" His pause was eloquent. "I won't let you out of my

Her fingers brushed his—well, it would be the last time.

him. And all through the meal she leaned an infinitesimal inch closer to him than to the other man on her right, and her smile was warmer for his smile, her eyes brighter for his eyes.

As the others made ready for the inevitable bridge, she leaned close and whispered: "I hate bridge! Can we renege?"

sight again. I'm afraid it is all a dream and you'll waft away in my cigarette smoke, or"—and his smile grew a bit wry—"or slip out of the French window when my back is turned!"

Her mouth, as she laughed up at him, was like a flower welcoming the kiss of dew. "I won't run away from you any more," she told him gayly.

"It's a promise!" he whispered, and she bent her lovely head in agreement.

SOME one started the radio and, out on the veranda, the music came to them in pulsing waves of melody. He held out his arms without speaking, and wordlessly she drifted into them and they danced. Against her gleaming hair his voice was throbbing, passionate, humming the tune the radio was beating out:

"I know why I waited, promised to be true—
Prayed each night for some one, exactly like you!"

His arms were holding her close, close, and she could feel that mad race of his heart against hers, his warm breath on her mouth.

"Oh, you're sweet, sweet!" he breathed shakily, his lips against her cheek. "I'm never going to let you go!"

"But you don't know me," she whispered, her eyes shining.

"But I will," he promised.

"I may be some terrible person," she went on, "some really impossible girl who—"

His laughter was low, heady—"who dashes into perfectly strange men's cars! Or runs away from the most puzzling pursuers. Or—or cribs one's brother-in-law's jewels! In spite of all the horrible possibilities I'm not going to let you go!"

She was suddenly tense as a wooden figure in his arms. He stared at her in amazement and found her wide-eyed. "Why, what on earth—"

"I—I thought I heard a—a step in the grass," she managed. Then, as he looked over the moonlit lawn, scarcely an inch of which was not by this time as bright as day, she added tremulously: "Oh, it's nonsense, of course! But"—her eyes grew imploring—"let's go in, please! I think—I think I'll go to my room, if you don't mind."

The last was a plea, and at once he led her inside, where she said her good night to the others. Hugh watched her go up the wide stairs, and at the top she turned to smile at him in farewell.

A strange presentiment nagged at him and, not in the humor for conversation or bridge, he wandered out onto the lawn. He smoked in silence for some time, leaning against a pillar of the porch. His mind kept turning over the puzzling sequence of events connected with Eunice Minor. The peculiar circumstance of her rushing into his car, the coincidence of her presence at the exact location of the robbery—

He caught himself up, chagrined at the way his thoughts were wending, and threw away the cigarette with an impatient gesture.

A cloud scudded before the moon, veiling its bright face. Hugh started. He could have sworn he had heard a whisper of footsteps on the grass. His thoughts flew to the girl. Eunice—

Soundlessly he moved until he could gain a view of the window of her room. A small balcony jutted out from the wall, rioting now with ivy on trellises.

And as he stared his heart began to pound, for a man was cautiously ascending the trellis.

Hugh leaped into action. In a few silent strides he was close, hidden by a group of evergreens. Then he saw a second man waiting below.

This one's eyes were on his climbing companion when *wham!* Hugh's fist crashed against his ear and he collapsed without a groan to the ground.

Breathing quickly, Hugh looked up. The other was at the sill of Eunice's

room, peering cautiously into the darkness inside. Hugh waited until he had gained the balcony, and then, swift as an aroused puma, was after him.

EUNICE suddenly sat up in bed, her heart shaking her with terror. Some one was in the room! She could hear soft breathing. The hair rose on her head; she opened her lips on a scream.

"Hugh!" she cried in the abject terror of a child. "Hugh!"

Instantly the darkness was riven as the light flashed on and she saw Hugh climbing over the sill. There was another man inside the room. He was jerking at his pocket; a revolver appeared like magic in his hand and he leveled it at Hugh. She cried out a terrified warning, but Hugh continued his bull-like charge. The gun barked as the two men crashed to the floor.

There were running feet in the hallway as Eunice struggled into a wrap that lay on the chair beside her bed. She opened the door and admitted Eleanor Winters and her husband, the others, wide-eyed and questioning, at his back.

"Hugh"—she gasped— "There—a —thief! Help him!" she implored, but Winters stopped on the threshold.

"Doesn't look as though he needed much help," he commented dryly, and then Eunice saw Hugh getting to his feet and coming to her. A huddled form lay sprawled on the rug.

He caught her in his arms as she swayed. "Dear," she breathed, as the others went below to see to the intruder on the lawn, "you are not hurt? The shot didn't strike you?" Then, "Oh, I was afraid, afraid! When I saw him point that revolver at you!" She was shaking from head to foot, and he whispered in her ear:

"Pull yourself together, do! And tell me—what are these men to you? Why did they—" Then, passionately protecting: "You may trust me, Eunice. I don't understand a lot of things, but whatever there is between you and these fellows—"

She gazed at him with the wide, clear eyes of innocence. "I never saw him before!" she said distinctly.

Before he could reply, Winters, with the others, was entering, intensely satisfied. "Good work, Hugh, old fellow!" his brother-in-law cried. "Cracked him with his own weapon, didn't you? The other bird is still out, as dead as a door nail. This one"—he looked down at the prostrate form on the floor—"won't bother us for a few minutes either. By that time the police will arrive to gather them in. We'll take him downstairs with his pal."

He turned to Eunice. "I suppose you're frightened sick," he said gently. "The first time any one has ever attempted to rob my home, and they had to start in on your room! Evidently," he added, "they weren't satisfied with what they got earlier in the day."

Eleanor put tender arms about the girl. "Poor dear, you're trembling like a leaf. Here," she went on determinedly to the others, "we'll just clear the room and let Miss Minor alone."

Turning at the door, she smiled at Hugh and the girl, still standing there. "Good night," she said; then, with hidden laughter in her voice, "I'm sure Hugh will take care of you!"

When Eunice and Hugh were alone she turned to him, her eyes still fear-ridden, but grateful now. "I was so afraid you'd been hurt," she whispered, "and on account of me!"

He felt a sudden lift of spirits at the anxiety in her tone. "Would you have cared?" he asked.

Her answer was low, but as simple as a child's. "Oh, terribly," she admitted, and then the tension was relieved and both were smiling.

"I'm going to leave you now," he said at the door, "but to-morrow—" He paused.

She filled in almost gayly: "When we know each other better—"

Reluctantly he whispered: "Good night!" And as reluctantly she murmured, "Good night!"

WHILE she could still hear his descending steps on the stairs she flew to the window. Below an automobile had drawn up and as she watched men in uniform began to pile out—policemen! She could hear the excited hum of voices below, but not a word penetrated to her as she listened with bated breath at her slightly opened door on the landing above. And then she saw the bluecoats coming up the stairs.

She stifled a cry when Hugh's breathless voice whispered at her ear. "Quickly!" he gasped. "I ran up the servants' staircase to warn you—the police are coming to question you!"

"To question me?" she repeated, terrified.

"The men have regained consciousness," he rushed on headlong. "They've confessed robbing Carl's place. But they say the loot is in this house!"

She seemed incapable of coherent speech. "In this house?" she reiterated distractedly.

He shook her with gentle insistence. "Brace up, dearest! Don't you see—don't you understand? They're coming to search your room, to ask you what you know of the jewels."

She seemed too distraught to stir and he hurriedly closed the door and locked it, standing with his back to it. His rapid glance took in the disorder of the room from his struggle with the intruder, the rugs kicked up, the chairs overturned. But on one, still upstanding, was the small black bag Eunice had carried.

She seemed about to faint, and he caught her in his arms, kicking forward the chair with his foot. It crashed to the floor, pitching the bag down. The clasp parted, and there in the lamplight lay diamonds like liquid fire and emeralds of incomparable luster spilling out their beauty on the rug, a veritable fortune shimmering in a thousand lights and shadows.

She was staring at the glittering things while the room seemed to rock with the terrible silence that had fallen.

At that moment the murmur of voices came closer; there was an imperious knock on the door.

Hugh was galvanized into life. "The police!" he groaned. "They mustn't find these things in this room!"

In one swift lunge he had swept the sparkling jewels into his hands; in another he was at the open window. His arms went up and back. When he turned to Eunice again his hands were empty.

The police were pounding at the door. With a warning glance at Eunice Hugh called calmly: "Coming!"

When he opened the door the others poured in like a tide. Eleanor was flushed and angry. "I've tried to tell them that the thieves broke into this room because it was the most convenient one," she said, with a swift glance from Hugh to the white-faced girl at his side. "I've assured them there could be no possible connection between Miss Minor and jewel thieves." She paused, with a long look at Eunice; she somehow gave the impression that she was playing for

time. "But it seems the men insist that a girl is connected with the robbery, that she ran off with their loot." Her shoulders went up in an angry shrug. "Of course the whole thing is ridiculous!"

In the babble of voices only Eunice was silent. She opened her lips as though to speak, but Hugh sent her a warning glance.

"Preposterous!" he snapped. "But if you wish"—he turned to the police—"you may search the room. I hardly think you'll find anything worth your trouble!"

"I've told them how absurd the whole thing is," Eleanor went on. "Miss Minor is our guest and you have known her for—" She paused, and her eyes went to Hugh as though for answer to a question.

HIS smile was utterly confident.

"I feel that I've known her all my life!" he said defiantly.

Every one in the room was staring at Eunice, and now she drew herself up. "Oh, you've been so kind," she said to Hugh, and her voice was full of tears. "But I think perhaps I'd better tell everything."

He put out his hand as though to stop her and advanced until he stood at her side. She gave him one swift, tender glance, and began breathlessly:

"I was in Mr. Winters's store when the robbery was committed." Then, not pausing at the gasps that went through the room, she hurried on: "There was a—a friend with me when I went in and I saw two men, with their back to me, standing as though talking to the two clerks behind the counter. I thought nothing of it." She looked from Hugh to Carl Winters for understanding. "There seemed nothing wrong—the men just stood there.

"I had an overnight bag," she went on, and her voice was trembling, very low. "I—I was—excited. I set my bag down on the floor. I remember now there was a similar bag close to mine. And then—then—I suddenly made up my mind to go out of the store without—without looking at anything. And then"—she raised the long black fringe of her lashes and sent an imploring look to Hugh—"I picked up the wrong bag! And these men have been chasing me ever since, trying to regain their loot. And," she added, in a last smothered rush, "you'll find the stolen jewels under the window!"

There was a stampede for the window; then Eleanor's cool voice advised: "Let's go below—we can't see a thing from up here!" The others poured through the door, down the stairs, seemingly unaware that there were many things yet to be explained, among them how a fortune in diamonds and emeralds came to be lying under the window.

Eunice waited until the room was silent again. Her eyes were misty as she and Hugh stared at each other. At last she began: "You thought I had taken those horrible jewels and yet you—liked me—you wanted to shield me! You liked me enough to—"

"Loved you," he corrected. "Loved you enough to forget all the holdups in the world. Loved you enough to want to run off with you to Panama so that—"

"—so that I could escape the consequences of my crimes," she filled in, her eyes like a soft summer night.

"Enough for even more than that," he admitted. "I knew that, when the time came, there would be an explanation for every question that was in my mind. Never for a moment did I doubt that."

"And now," said she, smiling, "ask me what I was doing in Mr. Winters's store!"

He grinned. "All right. What were you doing in Mr. Winters's store?"

She gave a delighted little gurgle. "I was selecting my wedding ring."

"Selecting—your wedding ring—" he stammered. Then at his expression of dismay she relented.

"I was engaged to Jason Peters, a friend of my uncle, with whom I live. Your sister knew it, though we had never met." She smiled a little. "The papers were full of it for weeks. Eleanor spoke of my going abroad. Well, that was to be my honeymoon. But," and her voice fell, her eyes were troubled, "the closer grew the date set for the wedding the more panicky I became. I lost my nerve. But my uncle scoffed and went right ahead with the preparations. I didn't love Jason, but I admired him and I thought perhaps that was enough, since I had never met any one I felt I could love. And then" —she paused, her eyes shadowed—"I came in to select my ring!"

She looked up at him, and away again and went on quickly. "I knew then I couldn't go through with it! I was utterly rattled. I wanted only one thing—to get out of that store and to run and run and never see Jason Peters again." She extended her hands in an eloquent gesture.

"Unknowingly, I snatched up the wrong bag, rushed to where your car was parked and—and—" she finished, "you know the rest. When those gunmen chased us I thought it was my uncle and—and Jason whom I left so precipitately in Mr. Winters's store. They'll be furious, I know. But"—and she was suddenly glowing on Hugh—"I don't care!"

"Nor I!" he breathed, and held her close, claiming the sweetness of her lips. "We can still run off to Panama!"

Below, the excitement subsiding, some one had turned on the radio. As the strains of an orchestra wafted up on the quiet moonlight, Eunice sighed contentedly in Hugh's arms. The tune that reached them was a lazy fox trot. Against her cheek his low croon thrilled with utter happiness:

"Lucky me, lovable you—
Aren't we—the happiest two-o!
I never knew such wonderful bliss,
And I thank my lucky star for this—"

Life and Love

WHERE heartache never stalked, joy has not walked.
A place strife never framed, peace has not claimed.
It is the great contrast, which makes hope last—
Lo, it takes tears and laughter for what we're after!

—*Peter A. Lea*

Gypsy Lover

"You are now a slave," her captor told her. Defiantly she looked into his eyes — and something happened

Sandy forgot that she was his prisoner, forgot that she hated him

By Ruth Ferris

"OH, Sandy, do you suppose it's haunted?"

Sandy Calhoun laughed, and gave her companion a quick hug.

"It's haunted with romance," she declared. "My castle—my very own castle!"

The two girls stood on the grassy terrace, bright eyes taking in every detail of the huge old castle which towered above them. Built of gray stone, with jutting wings and fascinating turrets, weatherbeaten and centuries old, it challenged their gay youth.

"Mary," breathed Sandy, after a moment, "there's a moat and a drawbridge. Oh, isn't this just too perfect!"

She gave the other's hand a joyous squeeze, but Mary was beginning to frown. "The drawbridge is up," she remarked, "and I don't see any signs of life. Do you suppose the caretaker or the major-domo or whatever you call him, didn't get your wire? Where are Wade and Aunt Honora? I thought they were right behind us."

"I think Wade is still trying to make that driver understand his brand of Italian," replied Sandy. "Do you suppose I should go and help him out?"

"Oh, let him alone," answered the girl carelessly. "If we're going to live here with you a year, we'll all have to learn Italian."

Sandy nodded. "I'm so glad now that father made me learn it," she remarked. "Sometimes I wonder if he knew that Count Moretti would leave the castle and estate to me."

"Well, your father was the count's adopted son, and now you are the only one of the family left," was Mary's prosaic answer. "But I'm worried about that drawbridge. And doesn't that iron-studded door look forbidding? Do you suppose they haven't seen us?"

Sandy stepped forward a little, put her gloved hands about her small red mouth, and sent a high, shrill call through the clear air.

"You should have yelled, 'What ho! The Castle!'" giggled Mary. "Maybe we'll have to swim the moat, after all."

But it seemed that no such desperate measures would be needed. The iron-studded door opened, and a bent, withered old man came hobbling out. The drawbridge began to lower, creaking protestingly.

While the girls watched in pleased excitement, there came a sound of quick footsteps behind them, and they turned.

"Where have you been, Wade?" queried Sandy, smiling at him. "Look—there it is! My castle in Spain!" She waved her arm in a mock dramatic gesture.

The young man's cold blue eyes surveyed the building, and his habitual little frown deepened.

"Don't be silly," he said. "This isn't Spain, it's Italy. And was that you shouting a minute ago? What an undignified thing to do, Sandy?"

"Very hoydenish, I must say," came another voice from behind him, as Aunt Honora, puffing a trifle, gained the terrace in time to hear Wade's words.

Sandy opened her lips to retort, then closed them, a deep flush staining her face. Mary was studying the ground at her feet.

After a moment of uncomfortable silence Sandy managed a smile. "Come, the drawbridge is down," she said. "Let's go in. You are all my guests—welcome to my castle!"

She led the way, a brave, gallant little figure, and the others followed her across the drawbridge and into the ancient, oak-paneled castle hall.

WHEN Sandy Calhoun, at seventeen, had found herself without either father or mother she had scarcely had time to wonder what was to become of her before she found herself firmly estabtablished in the home of Honora Seelinger, girlhood friend of Sandy's mother.

The household consisted of Mrs. Seelinger, her nephew, Wade Reese, and Wade's half-sister Mary. In Mary Sandy had found a firm and loyal friend, and in Wade she had found—a fiancé.

She scarcely knew, even now, how it had come about that she and Wade were engaged to be married. She supposed she must love him; at least she had not been able to find any valid reason for refusing his proposal.

She only knew that since the engagement Wade, aided and abetted by Aunt Honora, had ruled her life with a firm

hand. She sometimes wondered what would happen if she should rebel against them, firmly assert herself and stand up for her own rights. Still, Wade's huge diamond winked and flashed on her engagement finger, and she always found herself acceding to his wishes.

She wondered that he and his aunt had ever consented to this year in Italy. The whole thing was the result of the eccentric will that Count Moretti had left.

The count had lived for many years in America, and had, while there, legally adopted Sandy's father, then a young boy. They had lived together in Italy for some years, but to Sandy the whole thing had been only a romantic legend.

Then, shortly after her nineteenth birthday, had come word that the count was dead, and had willed her all his estate, provided that she would live for one year in the ancestral castle.

She was thinking of the old count now as she stood looking about the huge old hall. This had been his home and the home of his family for generations. Now it all belonged to her, or would when her year was up. She felt almost like an alien, an intruder, yet the romance of the situation thrilled her heart.

How she wished that just she and Mary were going to live here for one happy, enchanted year. But she had not dared even suggest such a thing to Aunt Honora; she and her nephew had come along as a matter of course.

She glanced at Wade. He was striding about, looking at everything with a proprietary air.

Then she saw that the bent old man who had admitted them stood before her. He addressed her in halting, broken English, but she interrupted with her swift Italian, watching the look of pleasure that overspread his face.

"Didn't you expect us?" she asked. "Were you not informed?"

"Oh, yes, signorina!" He bobbed his old head up and down like a funny automaton.

"Then why did you not have the drawbridge down, ready for us? And why have a drawbridge? This place is fortified like a castle of feudal days!"

"Yes, signorina," mumbled the ancient. "It is because we are afraid of the gypsies."

"What's this?" Wade strode forward. "What are you talking about?"

"The gypsies—the tribe of gypsies. They will not leave us in peace. They terrorize us, signore, even though, being servants, we have had nothing to do with their feud."

"A feud?" put in Sandy quickly. "What do you mean? And what right have a band of gypsies on the estate?"

"The right of might, sweet signorina. We have done our best, but we are few and they are many. We have never dared even lower the drawbridge, after dark!"

"But what is their grievance?"

"Ah, it is revenge, and goes back many, many years. It concerns a one-time lord of the castle and a fair gypsy maiden. The gypsies have carried their hatred down through generations, and have sworn that the people of the castle shall never live in peace!"

SUDDENLY Wade strode up to the old man. "Hush your tongue!" he cried angrily. "Such talk is just a lot of servants' foolishness, and I want it stopped! Show us to our rooms, will you?"

The old man bowed and, turning, began to fumble with candles. Sandy

stared at Wade. He had always ordered her about, but now it seemed that he considered himself the lord and master of her castle. And it was hers. She was not married to him—yet.

She seized Mary's hand for comfort as they followed the servant up the wide staircase, and the girl put a quick arm about her.

"Don't you care, Sandy, dear," she whispered. "It's your castle, and I know we're going to have a lot of fun here, even if Wade persists in being horrid. To-morrow let's look for secret passageways, shall we? And wasn't the story of the gypsies thrilling?"

"You—you think it was just a story, then?" murmured Sandy in reply. "You don't think there's anything to be frightened about?"

"Oh, I imagine the funny old butler, or whatever he is, was laying it on rather thick. This is nineteen thirty, you know, and bloody vendettas have rather gone out of style. Oh, Sandy, what an immense room—and look at that bed. Why, ten people could sleep in it. You've got to sleep with me, Sandy, or I know I'll be just frightened to death!"

Sandy laughingly assented, and the two of them explored the enormous room, while Wade and Aunt Honora were shown on down the corridor to their respective apartments.

Turning, a few moments later, from her inspection of the luxurious bed, Sandy saw that Mary was going all around the room, carefully tapping the oak paneling, and listening like an inquisitive bird.

"Come on here, you sleuth," Sandy laughed. "Do you expect to find a secret passageway and a lot of rattling skeletons before we've even had our dinner? Come and remove a little of the dust of travel, will you?"

"All right." Mary reluctantly desisted from her fascinating occupation. "Where's the bathroom?"

"Bathroom, my dear! Where do you think you are—at the Ritz? You'll wash your face in this antique silver bowl, and be glad of the chance!"

After the excellent dinner that was served in a dining hall that would have accommodated a hundred guests, the four of them went on a tour of inspection of the main rooms on the lower floor.

The library intrigued Sandy, but the rest urged her on, until they came to the music room, from which Mary refused to budge.

"I can't live another five minutes without trying this marvelous grand piano," she declared. "You people can stay or go, I don't care!" She ran her fingers over the ivory keys, listening in delight to the harmony they evoked.

"Come, Sandy," said Wade suddenly. "Let's look at the rose garden. I noticed it this afternoon."

"But, Wade—it's on the other side of the moat!"

"What of that? One of the servants can lower the drawbridge—or I'll do it myself."

"Go ahead, children," commanded Aunt Honora. "I will sit here and listen to Mary play. Sandy, go with Wade."

Sandy went, resenting the older woman's tone, but helpless to defy her. After all, there was probably no danger from the gypsies. No doubt it was all an old wives' tale.

They crossed the ancient bridge and wandered up and down the garden paths.

A fair crescent moon hung in the sky, and the air was soft and sweet with the perfume of millions of blossoms. Sandy stared up at the stars and

wished that she were alone, so that she might feel free, might abandon her soul to the beauty of the night.

Suddenly she felt Wade's arms about her. He held her tightly, and she felt his heart pounding under her cheek, but no answering thrill touched her veins. She lifted her face casually and felt his lips hard upon hers. She supposed she should kiss back, but a sudden listlessness had taken possession of her, and she received his caresses as if she were a beautiful, but lifeless doll.

"Sandy!" panted Wade. "I love you! Say that you are mine, Sandy—all mine!"

She nodded her head. There was something so crude and domineering about his lovemaking. She longed for a tender lover, one who would thrill her soul with passion and romance. But probably there were none like that, outside of books. She drew away from Wade's straining arms.

"Let's go in now, shall we?" she said. "There aren't any gypsies—and I want to hear Mary play."

Sullenly he stepped back, and she preceded him. The path she chose was bordered by thick clumps of shrubbery, so that there were many deep pools of shadow.

Looking ahead of her, she thought that one of the shadows moved a little, and she stopped involuntarily.

"What's the matter?" asked Wade, a pace or two behind her.

"Nothing," she returned, ashamed to show him that she was nervous. She went swiftly on, and drew a little breath of relief when they had safely passed the bush she had noticed.

"I wonder why the gypsies—" she began, and then broke off with a startled scream at the sudden sound of a muffled blow. She whirled quickly, just in time to see Wade, clutching madly at empty air, fall to the ground and lie still.

There were shadowy forms all about her, and Sandy opened her lips to scream again, when suddenly a cloth enveloped her head. She struggled wildly against its suffocating folds, but strong arms closed about her, holding her captive.

She was clutched tightly against a warm body, whose touch sent a queer shivering thrill through her nerves. It was as if she had touched an electric current. For an instant she drooped, helpless to move or cry out, but when she felt herself lifted from the ground she began to struggle madly.

Years of tennis and basket ball had strengthened her muscles. She gave a violent lunge, and felt herself free of the arms. She tore at the cloth that muffled her head, and had it almost off when a sweet, sickish odor began to penetrate to her nostrils. Her struggles diminished; she grew weak and limp, and then blankness overwhelmed her.

THE soft, wailing notes of a violin surged through her ears, and Sandy lifted a feeble hand to her forehead. Where was she? What had happened? She scarcely wanted to open her eyes, for her eyelids felt like leaden weights, and a curious lassitude pervaded her whole body.

The music was close to her, all about her, it seemed, and she lay there quietly, listening to it, her mind blank of any thought or reasoning. She was under the spell of its enchantment, and memory had left her; there was only the softly weaving melody, holding her in thrall.

Then it stopped, on a wailing minor note, and in the same instant Sandy remembered. The black shadows—

Wade lying ominously still on the garden path—the suffocating cloth over her head.

She opened her eyes and stared about her.

She was lying on a blanket spread on the hard ground, and over her head was the cloth of a tent. There was a pungent smell of wood smoke in her nostrils, and she heard a distant sound like shouting voices. What was this place, and how had she got there?

She felt weak and sick, and there was a terrible pain in her head, but curiosity overwhelmed all other feeling. Moaning a little with the pain it cost her to move, she raised herself on one elbow and surveyed her surroundings.

It was then that she saw him, a dark, handsome young man who sat cross-legged on the ground at the opposite side of the tent, carelessly holding a violin in his hands.

He was watching her, and as she met the glance of those piercing black eyes she shivered suddenly, not knowing why, and found herself unable to look away from him.

There was a depth to his eyes, as if she were staring into bottomless pools of darkness, losing herself, plunging fathoms deep. Subconsciously she noted that he was lithe, well-built and muscular, that his face was brown and lean, that his mouth was pleasantly yet firmly shaped.

He was looking at her with a strange expression of triumph on his face, elation, and—was it perhaps a shade of regret?

Sandy's mouth felt dry and cottony. She moistened her lips with her tongue two or three times and then spoke, wondering at the strange thinness of her own voice.

"Where am I? What happened? Why have you brought me here?" Then she realized that she had spoken English, and repeated her question in Italian.

A strange smile touched the lips of the man before her. "You are the mistress of the castle," he stated quietly.

Sandy stared. "Of course I am. What has that to do with my being here? How dare you keep me here in this place. Take me back to the castle at once!"

He jumped to his feet, and stood there looking down at her. He laughed, but his eyes were sober and stern, and she felt a sudden wave of terror sweep over her.

"You will stay here," he asserted, "until it is my pleasure to let you go!"

"What—what do you mean?" gasped the girl weakly.

"You are of the family of Moretti. You know why the gypsies desire revenge!"

"Who—who are you?" she half whispered.

"I am Nikky. I am the leader of the tribe; I am the great grandson of that gypsy girl who was stolen and done to death by one of your ancestors! And now, after centuries, revenge is in my hands!"

"But I don't understand—" faltered Sandy.

"You may understand this. I know that you are an American; nevertheless you belong to the Moretti family, and against them my revenge has been sworn for many years. Why did you walk in the rose garden with the American man? You were asking for trouble. It was too easy."

"I didn't know. Oh—Wade! What have you done to Wade? Have you killed him?"

The gypsy shrugged his shoulders.

"I do not know," he replied carelessly. "We left him where he fell. We have no concern with him. It is you who must pay the debt of the years."

SANDY stared at him, while a nameless terror settled over her heart. Why had she ever come to Italy? Why had not the count foreseen this? He must have known. Perhaps this was why he had willed his castle to an adopted granddaughter—he had thought that would break the ancient gypsy curse. But it had made no difference. She, innocent and ignorant of any wrongdoing, must suffer—what nameless horrors?—to satisfy the revengeful soul of this gypsy king.

How could any one with such a pleasant-looking face be so cruel? There was something about him that attracted her, drew her, even while she was frightened of him.

There was a sort of vibrant magnetism between them; she could feel it, and suddenly she knew that this was the man who had clasped her so closely in the rose garden.

A strange thrill swept through her at the memory, a feeling that she had never had before, could not understand. What was to be the end of this amazing adventure? Surely he would not kill her in cold blood? She stared up at him anxiously, awaiting the words that would seal her fate.

He raised the flap of the tent and looked out, standing there a moment or two; then he turned again to her.

"What—what are you going to do with me?" she faltered through dry lips.

The gypsy looked at her for a long moment, a curious expression in his dark eyes. Then he gave a short, mirthless laugh.

"You are now a slave," he said slowly, "the lowest servant in the camp, and will be treated as such. Do not think you can escape. We are high in the hills, in our own stronghold, and every pass is guarded. If you attempt to escape, you will learn the feel of a whip-lash!"

"Oh!" A little moan escaped the girl. "Why—why do you do this to me?"

"For revenge. Do you know the savor of revenge? It is very sweet. What is your name?" He actually barked the last words at her.

"Sandy," replied the girl.

"It will serve," he retorted contemptuously. "Do you see that pair of boots there beside you?"

She glanced at the high black boots flung carelessly beside her bed and nodded.

"Polish them!"

He strode out of the tent, and the flap fell behind him.

Sandy gasped, and a wave of anger swept over her. She, the mistress and owner of Moretti Castle, was to polish the boots of a vagabond gypsy! She would not do it; she would show him that he could not make a slave, a servant, of her!

So death was not to be her lot, but rather a servitude, a degradation that would afford pleasure to the cruel hearts of the gypsy tribe, and, above all, to their leader—what was his name?—Nikky.

A terrible anger and resentment against him shook her, but what hurt her most was the feeling that under different circumstances she would have liked him. There was something about him that attracted her strongly, drew her heart. How could he have such a likable face, have eyes whose glance moved her so strangely, and yet nurse a cruel revenge in his heart?

Her face felt flushed and feverish, and the pain in her head was growing worse. She lay back on the hard ground and threw her arm up over her eyes. She was worried about Wade, the memory of his still form there on the graveled path haunted her. What was happening back there at the castle? Did they realize what had occurred? Were they looking for her? How far away from the castle was she now? "Up in the hills," Nikky had said. But how far? Sandy realized that she could answer none of these questions, and she turned restlessly from side to side.

SUDDENLY she heard a low, scornful laugh, and drew her arm down from her eyes, staring upward in the gloomy half-light of the tent.

Standing over her, and staring curiously down, was a very pretty gypsy girl. Her black eyes sparkled with malice. A red kerchief bound her head, setting off her wild, dark beauty.

Perhaps here was a friend. Sandy tried to smile up at the girl, wondering if she might make friends with her, perhaps gain her help in escaping. There was no answering smile on the red lips, however; instead, there was a kind of hatred in her dark glance. Sandy shivered slightly.

Should she make the attempt at friendship? She had never had any experience with people of this sort. Nevertheless, here was a girl, like herself. Would she not be sympathetic?

"What is your name?" asked Sandy at last, smiling faintly.

"I am Nina," replied the girl, coquettishly adjusting her kerchief and strutting like a young peacock. Then her glance fell on Sandy again and she scowled. "What is that to you, servant, slave, dog?" she hissed. "Why do you lie there like a lump of dough? Bestir yourself, putty-face, for there is plenty for you to do!"

Suddenly she dashed to the tent flap and threw it open. "Ho! Come here, good people!" she shouted. "Anton—Marda—Giovanni—come and look at a servant girl who lies abed in the daytime and thinks herself a great lady!"

People came crowding around the opening, looking in, laughing, pointing scornful fingers at her. Their dark faces, flashing eyes, gleaming teeth and gaudy apparel surrounded her, until Sandy felt as if she were in a nightmare. Above all the clamor sounded the shrill, laughing voice of Nina, shouting a string of Italian words that made Sandy cover her ears and shut her eyes while she moaned faintly.

Then there was a louder voice shouting commands, and the sound of a blow or two, a laughing curse. The clamor died away; peace settled over the tent. Sandy opened her eyes, and then sat up, swaying dizzily.

Nikky stood there regarding her, a dark scowl on his face. He pointed to the boots, lying just where they had been before.

"You have not polished my boots," he said shortly.

Sandy tossed her head. "Of course I haven't," she retorted. "You can call me a servant, a slave, if you like, but that doesn't make me one!"

Nikky took one step forward, snatched up the boots and a cloth that lay beside them, and thrust them into her hands. Sandy stared up at him, bold defiance in her eyes.

For a long, intense moment the black eyes and the blue ones clashed, fought. Sandy felt a great struggle and turmoil within her. But she must,

not give in, she must not. If she let him conquer her now, she would be his, to do with as he wished. She went on staring, striving to summon all her will against his, yet she knew that the black eyes were conquering, wearing her down. Suddenly a deep flush dyed her face. She bent her head and began awkwardly to rub the cloth over the polished leather, while slow tears dropped on her hands. She heard a short, satisfied laugh, and then she was alone.

With a swift gesture she threw the boots from her, but she knew that it was of no use. Presently she would pick them up again and polish them until they shone like mirrors.

Why had she given in to him? Why let him paralyze her will? She hated herself for her weakness, yet she could not have borne the glance of those dark eyes another instant. Hate the thought as she would, she realized that this gypsy had conquered her.

ALL that day Sandy stayed in the tent, and with the passing of the hours hopelessness took possession of her. How could Mary and Aunt Honora and Wade—if Wade were alive—ever find her? Of course these gypsies were armed; no doubt they would shoot to kill if any rescue party came after her.

She longed for the open air, for it was dark and stuffy in the tent, but she dared not face again that ring of dark faces, those shrill taunts and the mocking laughter.

Whenever she thought of Nikky she flushed deeply, and a great resentment of outraged pride flooded her soul. She ought to hate him; she did hate him, she thought, yet her hatred was not so deep as she could have wished.

She had never known any one like him. How could she, during her sheltered life, have met such a person? She was desperately afraid of him, yet some complex emotion made her long to smooth back his straight black hair, to let her eyes plunge into the fathomless depths of his black ones, until her soul was lost and her personality merged with his.

At last came darkness, and food was brought to her—stew on a tin plate, thrust in to her as if she had been a dog. She ate it, though tears were choking her, for she still hoped for a chance to escape, and knew that she must not let herself become physically weak.

Presently she heard music, and the dancing, flickering light of a bonfire came to her through the cloth of the tent. She crept to the opening, drew back the flap a little and looked out.

The whole gypsy tribe, it seemed, had gathered around the fire, and the dancing flames lit up their dark faces, making a scene of wild, mysterious beauty. Three or four stringed instruments were playing, fantastic melodies that sent a strange leaping quiver through her veins, setting her blood to dancing.

She crouched there under the sheltering flap of the tent, drinking in the strange scene. Some of the men were dancing, while the others shouted and clapped their hands in time to the music. There was a great stamping of feet, and a twisting and turning of bodies. The girl stared in fascination. She had never seen men dance like this before—with such sheer exuberance of animal spirits.

Presently there were women dancing, too. Young women with dark, laughing faces, and eyes that frankly lured while their red lips smiled an invitation.

Suddenly there was a shout, and every one turned; the music stopped.

A girl's high, shrill voice said a few words, and then there came a great calling and clapping of hands. All the dancers drew back, until there was a wide cleared space in front of the fire. The music began again, a wild fierce tune, and into the open space leaped Nina.

Sandy drew in her breath sharply. Never in her life had she seen such dancing. It was a dance to appeal to the animal nature of man, and Sandy, glancing round the ring of shining, avid eyes, saw that they were all fascinated by her.

Then she gave a little start as she saw Nikky, lounging with casual grace against a rock that jutted out into the firelight. He, too, was watching the dance, but there was a look of boredom on his face.

Sandy saw that Nina, in her wild gesturing, was circling nearer and nearer to him. At last, to a flourish of the music, she whirled before him and fell into a deliberately inviting pose, leaning back against him, face upturned and crimson lips pursed invitingly.

There was scarcely a man there but would have kissed her under such provocation, and Sandy waited for Nikky to do so, wondering why a jealous twinge went through her own heart.

But Nikky did not kiss her. He looked down into her smiling, alluring face for a moment, and then deliberately turned away, saying something to a man at his side.

Such a look of rage swept over the face of the gypsy girl that Sandy expected to see her, in the next instant, snatch out a knife and plunge it into his heart. Instead, however, she laughed, and ran out of the circle into the darkness.

ANOTHER girl took her place, another dance started, but it had not the wild, abandoned lure of Nina's dancing, and the group of people moved restlessly.

Sandy scarcely heard the first voices, but in a moment or two there was a great clamor and shouting.

"The girl from the castle! Make her dance! Let us see if our fine lady knows how to dance!"

Sandy shrank back into the shelter of the tent, but in a moment rough hands were laid on her, and she was dragged out into the firelight.

She stood there, shrinking a little from the foreign faces that crowded about her. They were half laughing, half angry, but they were all commanding her to dance.

She looked across at Nikky. He was watching the scene, a strange half smile on his lips, but he made no move toward her.

Suddenly Sandy lifted her head bravely and her clear young voice rang out over the din.

"I will dance for you!" she cried. "I will dance the tango—if your chief will dance with me!"

There was an abrupt hush, and then a sudden burst of laughter. Sandy began to realize that these people were just children. They loved gayety, music, laughter and jokes. Well, here was a rare jest for them. Would Nikky dare refuse the challenge?

Probably he had never even heard of the tango; if so she could entangle him in the maze of the steps and make a laughing stock of him.

She stood there, a little, childish figure in her silvery lace dress, waiting for his answer.

His eyes met hers and held them for a long moment; then, with a word or two to the musicians, he stepped forward.

The space before the fire cleared as if by magic, and Sandy found herself facing Nikky. The music swung into a lilting, haunting refrain, with the lower beat that gave it tango time. Nikky held out his arms, and Sandy drifted into them.

That dance was pure magic. The girl was so enthralled that she forgot to wonder at the fact that her partner knew the steps even better than she did. They dipped and swayed in time to the music, and she forgot everything but the joy of the dance, the thrill of being in this man's arms.

There was silence, except for the music, and she knew that their audience was watching them, enchanted as children with a new toy. Sandy forgot that she was a prisoner, forgot that she hated Nikky, that she was faraway from home and friends. She knew only the joy of perfect, liquid movement.

At last came the climax of the dance. They posed, Sandy in her trailing silver frock bent far, far back over Nikky's arm, he leaning over her, eyes intently on her face.

Then, before she realized his intention, his lips were warm on hers, in a deep, passionate kiss.

For an instant she hung there, unable to think or move; then she tore herself from his arms, dashed across the open space, and into the refuge of the tent.

She expected to hear a burst of mocking laughter, but none came. Perhaps the gypsies had sensed the beauty and the tragedy of the scene they had witnessed.

With a cry Sandy rushed forward, but Wade flung her aside

Sandy never knew how long she crouched there in the darkness of the tent, while the music and the laughter outside continued.

At last, desperately weary, she lay down on the single blanket, trying to roll one corner of it under to make a pillow for her head. It was very uncomfortable, but at last she drifted into an uneasy sleep.

Hours later, something woke her. She had heard no sound, but there was

the subtle, indefinable feeling of another presence in the tent. She lay without moving, wide eyes staring into the darkness. All was still and black, yet she knew that some one was standing there beside her. She felt frozen, paralyzed.

Suddenly there was a swift movement, and she felt a hand on her shoulder. It was all she could do not to jerk away, to cry out. She knew the touch of that hand, its vibrant, electric contact. It was Nikky.

Then the hand was removed, and Sandy, scarcely breathing, felt a blanket laid over her, tucked in about her. Its soft folds cuddled gently about the curves of her body, and she suddenly realized that she had been cramped and uncomfortable with the chill of the night. The blanket was carefully adjusted until she was completely covered, then there came the sound of gentle, tiptoeing footsteps. The tent flap was raised and she had a glimpse of the stars; then darkness and lonely silence closed about her. With a strange smile curving her lips, Sandy snuggled down into the blanket, and fell asleep again.

NEXT morning a haggard old crone of a gypsy woman woke Sandy, commanding her to take off her dress of silver lace and put on the gypsy dress the woman had with her. What was the use of rebelling? She obeyed silently, and ate the breakfast the old woman handed to her.

She also followed, at the crone's command, to another tent, a sort of storeroom. Here was a miscellaneous collection of articles, thrown together helter-skelter, but the bulk of it was harness.

In harsh tones the old woman told her that she must mend the harness, and contemptuously showed her how to do it.

Hour after hour the girl bent to the difficult task, until her fingers were torn and bleeding, and she felt that her back must break in two. There was no use refusing to do it; Nikky would come and conquer her again, beat down the power of her will. And somehow, after last night, she did not want to quarrel with Nikky.

At last the day was finished, and the old woman conducted her back to her own tent. There were no signs of any men about the camp, she noticed, and that night there was neither music nor dancing.

Sandy, rolled in her two blankets, went to sleep with tears dripping from her lashes. She was thinking of Mary now, and Wade and Aunt Honora. How anxious they must be about her!

It was afternoon of the next day before the men returned. Sandy, struggling with the stiff leather of the harness, heard the shouts, the laughter and gay talk.

She ventured to go to the door of the tent and peer out. Yes, there was Nikky, laughing gayly, and pulling a bright red scarf out of his pocket to drape about the neck of the old woman who was her guardian. The woman was absurdly pleased with the gaudy gift, and Sandy suddenly began to wonder where he had got it? Was it stolen?

She saw that Nikky had asked the crone a question, and that she pointed toward the harness tent. Sandy quickly ducked back, and went at her work, head bent to hide the flush in her face, fingers trembling.

Nikky strode into the tent, and she knew that he was standing there, staring down at her. She would not look

up, however, and her shaking fingers made a very bad job of the work she was doing. At last he spoke, a low, soft note that she had not heard before, in his voice.

"Here is a gift for you, Sandy," he said.

She looked up, startled. He was dangling before her eyes a necklace of blue stones. A beautiful thing it was, for the stones flashed like sapphires, but at the sight of it she sprang to her feet.

"How dare you!" she gasped. "How dare you!"

She snatched the necklace from his hand and flung it to the ground between them, while her eyes flashed stormily to his.

"Don't you like it, then?" he asked. He was smiling, but his eyes were as passionately angry as hers.

Sandy became scornful. "Do you give your servant valuable jewels?" she inquired coldly. "*Stolen* jewels?"

A sudden impulse made her want to hurt him, to stab him to the heart with cruelty if she could.

He stared at her for a long moment, with an expression in his dark eyes that she could not read; then he abruptly turned and left the tent.

Sandy sat down to her work again, wiping away the trickling tears. The blue stones winked up at her, maliciously.

Scarcely a moment had passed, however, when a whirlwind, in the person of the gypsy girl Nina, tore into the tent.

Sandy looked up, startled, as Nina stopped dramatically before her. Quick as lightning, the gypsy girl stooped and snatched up the necklace.

"So!" she shrilled. "He gives you jewels! He brings you a necklace of blue stones! He loves you then, you with your white face and your yellow hair and your prim, lifeless dancing! But you will not get him! Nikky belongs to me, do you hear—to *me*."

She glared down at the other girl, shaking with rage. "I hate you!" she went on, her voice high and shrill. "You think that you will get him away from me, but you won't! I will kill you!"

She flashed out a knife, a glittering, jeweled little stiletto, and Sandy shrank back. With a bound, the gypsy was upon her, savage hand on her throat, pushing her back, pinning her to the ground. The knife flashed before her eyes; then she felt it bite deeply into her flesh.

Through a haze of pain she saw the knife lifted for a second blow, saw a sinewy brown hand grasp Nina's wrist and wrench it backward, saw the gypsy girl lifted, and hurled to the floor. Then Nikky's face bent over hers, and his lips moved, but she could not hear what he was saying, for the roaring in her ears. Then his face was blotted out as blackness engulfed her.

WHEN Sandy regained consciousness she felt herself in the open air, and the stars were winking above her. She was being carried in a pair of strong, gentle arms, and she knew, without looking up into his face, that it was Nikky who was bearing her somewhere, away from the camp.

There was a faint pain in her shoulder, and she could see that it was swathed in bandages.

At last Nikky, climbing up a little rocky path, turned aside and set the girl gently down on a huge bowlder, keeping his arms about her as if reluctant to let her go.

Sandy glanced up at him, but at the

expression in his eyes she flushed and looked away, staring down the way they had come, at the distinct flicker of the camp fire.

"So I wasn't killed, then," she said at last.

His arms tightened about her, but she pushed him gently away and drew herself over to the side of the rock.

"I reached Nina just in time," he told her. "She shall be punished severely for her savagery."

"Oh, don't do anything to her," protested Sandy. "She was within her rights—for in such a lawless community who cares what happens to a servant girl?"

"Ah, Sandy, do not say that!" There was protest and pain in Nikky's voice. "I told them down there that you needed fresh air, but I really brought you up here, knowing that you would soon regain consciousness, to tell you what is in my heart."

He seized her hands in his, and she knew that he was looking pleadingly at her, but she would not meet his eyes.

"Truly I did think," he told her sadly, "that my heart could hold only —revenge. But now I know that it is not true. Since I have known you, the world has been changed for me. You came into my life, and now there is no room in my heart for revenge and hatred—there is only love there. A great love, Sandy, that will endure as long as my life lasts!"

The girl trembled a little. There was a wooing note in his voice, and she felt his dark eyes on her, caressing, pleading. She wanted to turn to him, to bury her face on his shoulder and sob out her soul in his arms, but she only sat there, staring into the distance, and there was no softness in her face.

"I hate myself for what I have done to you," he went on gently. "I would give anything to undo what has happened—but that cannot be. I can only ask you to forgive me, to let me love you. Oh, Sandy, I love you; I love you so!"

He drew her into his arms, against his wildly beating heart, but she pushed him away again, although it took all the strength of her will and caused her heart a pang of agony.

"Sandy!" he implored. "Won't you forgive me?"

How she longed to turn to him, to take his dark head in her arms and hold it against her breast. But outraged pride burned in her.

"I cannot," she said at last, coldly. "I despise and hate you! What you have done is unforgivable!"

Even while she spoke the words she knew that she was lying. She did not hate him; she wanted to forgive him, to let him make love to her. But she could not.

Here was the tender, romantic lover for whom she had longed, and there was an insurmountable barrier between them. What had she done that fate should be so cruel to her?

NEITHER of them noticed a stealthy movement behind the rock, but suddenly dark forms sprang up all about them, it seemed. Sandy gasped, and jumped down from the rock, hurling herself into Nikky's arms. But the next instant she was torn from them, and he was surrounded by a struggling mass of figures. He fought valiantly, but the odds were too great, and in scarcely a moment he lay stretched on the ground at Sandy's feet, his white, unconscious face turned to the stars.

It was not until then that she saw Wade standing beside her.

"Sandy!" He made as if to clasp her in his arms, but she stepped back quickly. "Thank heaven we've found you at last! Why, you're wounded! What has happened to you? Are you badly hurt?"

"It is nothing," said Sandy chokingly. "But Nikky"—she pointed to the still form on the ground—"you have killed him!"

"No such luck!" retorted Wade bitterly. "He's only stunned. Bind him with those ropes we brought, men, and bring him along. Come, Sandy."

He reached for her hand, and forced her along the path beside him. Scarcely yet realizing what had happened, Sandy allowed herself to be led. They were carrying Nikky, somewhere behind her.

"How—" she gasped at last. "How did you know where I was?"

"One of the castle servants was a gypsy spy," Wade told her, "and we forced him to lead us here. I would have come for you before, but they gave me a nasty knock on the head, and I was unconscious for a day and a half. But at last you're safe, Sandy!"

"Yes," she replied quietly. "At last—I'm safe."

"Why do you say that so strangely?" inquired Wade quickly. "This man we captured—he is the chief, isn't he?"

Sandy nodded.

"What did he do to you?" His tone was savage.

"N-nothing. Only kept me captive."

"For ransom, I suppose," Wade retorted, "Although it's strange they made no demand on us for money. But I suppose that would have come before long."

Sandy said nothing. Wade had not believed the old servant's tale of the gypsies' desire for revenge—let him think she had been held for ransom.

She could only think of Nikky, being carried back there, unconscious, perhaps wounded.

"What—" she faltered. "What are you going to do with him?"

They were stumbling down over rocky paths, scratched by briers and hampered by undergrowth.

"With whom?" asked Wade, helping her over a huge rock.

"With Nikky—the gypsy chief?" She tried to keep her desperate anxiety from sounding in her voice. She knew how vindictive Wade could be at times.

"I'll tell you when we get to the castle," was the reply.

After that she accompanied him in silence, her heart and brain in a turmoil of emotion.

AT last they were back in the great hall of the castle. Sandy felt as if she had been away for years, or as if it had been some other girl who had so joyously wanted to look for secret passageways.

Nikky had regained consciousness, although there was blood streaming from a cut in his forehead, and the men who had accompanied Wade dumped him unceremoniously down on the stone-paved floor.

With a little cry of pity Sandy ran forward, but before her outstretched hands could touch the bound, helpless man, Wade shoved her aside.

"Come here, Giuseppe," he commanded. "Are there dungeons in this castle?"

Giuseppe, a burly rough fellow, smiled evilly. "Yes, signore," he responded. "There are strong dungeons below the castle cellars. Every one about here knows that, and knows to what use they were put years ago!"

"I have no concern with many years

ago," retorted Wade. "Take this man and lock him up in the strongest dungeon. Come, I will go with you to see that my orders are carried out!"

"But, Wade!" screamed Sandy, running forward and grasping his arm. "You can't do that!"

"Why can't I?" He turned on her savagely. "You keep out of this, Sandy. I know what I'm doing!"

He shoved her away, so that she tottered and fell onto a bench by the wall, and with agonized tears in her eyes she saw the two strongest men lift Nikky as if he had been a sack of meal and stride away, Wade following.

"Nikky!" moaned the girl faintly.

She scarcely knew when Aunt Honora and Mary found her, but once in Mary's comforting arms she broke down, crying bitterly.

"Come, she must be put to bed at once," commanded Aunt Honora. "Her nerves are quite shattered by her trying experience, and she must have rest."

"No, no!" protested Sandy, lifting her head. "I must see Wade! I must talk to him!"

"Nonsense! You can see Wade later on!"

"No," Sandy persisted. "I've got to see him, I've got to—to know—"

At that moment Wade came striding in, quite like the lord of the castle, followed by his henchmen.

"Well, Sandy," he cried, "your gypsy is securely locked up. You can go to bed and sleep peacefully now."

Sandy broke from Mary's arms and ran up to Wade, putting her two small hands appealingly on his breast.

"Wade," she faltered. "What—what are you going to—to do with him?"

"The first thing in the morning I'll turn him over to the authorities. We have enough against him to be sure that he will be executed. Kidnaping is a serious thing, you know!"

"Executed!" repeated Sandy slowly. "Executed!"

"Of course. You ought to be glad of it. I fancy the gypsies won't be so bold after this!" Wade was in a rare good humor. "Come, Sandy, give me a kiss and then let Mary and Aunt Honora put you to bed. You are worn out."

"No! No!" cried the girl suddenly. "You can't do that! You must not hold him prisoner; you must not give him to the law! Oh, please let him go, Wade; he hasn't done anything really wrong!"

"Say!" Wade's hands gripped her shoulders, his fingers pressing cruelly, so that she winced from the pain of her wound. "What's the matter with you, Sandy Calhoun? You didn't want me to touch that bandit—you don't want him turned over to the law, to meet the fate he richly deserves. Why? *Are you in love with him?*"

Sandy, suddenly calm, struggled away from his hands. "You're hurting me," she complained. "I have a knife wound in that shoulder."

"Answer my question!" shouted Wade, his face flushed and mottled with anger. "Are you in love with that gypsy?"

Sandy walked over and stood beside Mary, who was watching the scene with wide eyes. "Of course not," she said at last, very coolly. "Why should I love him? Don't be silly! Come, Mary, I think there's been enough excitement. Let's go up to our room."

ONCE in the refuge of the big room, Sandy's courage forsook her, and she dropped wearily on the bed, hiding her face in her hands.

Mary ran forward and gathered her into strong young arms, drawing Sandy's head down to her shoulder.

"Oh, Sandy!" she breathed, "tell me everything! I'll just die if I don't find out pretty soon what this is all about! What happened after they stole you from the rose garden? How did you get the knife wound in your shoulder? Where were you—and who is Nikky?"

Sandy drew a long, sobbing breath. "Oh, Mary," she wailed, "I'm the most unhappy girl in the world!"

In broken, halting sentences she told all that had occurred in the gypsy camp.

"And now," she finished at last, "now Wade will turn him over to the law, and they'll kill him—I know they will. Oh, Mary, I just can't bear it!"

"You love him, then?" queried her friend softly.

"I—I—yes, I do," admitted Sandy. "I didn't realize it until Wade asked me, but then it all came over me like the lighting of a flame. I thought I hated him, but I don't. I adore him, and when he is taken away my—my life will be ended!"

She curled up on the bed, a little, wet-eyed bundle of misery. "If I could only get him out of that dungeon," she moaned. "If I could only help him to escape! His own people would protect him, would hide him from the law, from Wade's vindictiveness. Maybe he could leave the country, and then—after my year here is up I could follow him. I—I'd follow him to the ends of the earth, Mary!"

Her wide eyes were shining, staring into the distance as if she saw the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

"But, Sandy!" cried Mary suddenly. "Have you forgotten that you're engaged to Wade?"

Sandy nodded. "I had forgotten," she confessed. "Oh, I know now that I never loved Wade, never even dreamed what love is. Nikky is so wonderful! And when I think—when I think of what they'll do to him—"

"I know!" cried Mary, sudden determination in her voice. "We'll help him escape from the dungeon—from the castle! Then he can make his way back to the gypsy camp, and get away from the country!"

"Oh, Mary!" Sandy sat up, clasping her hands excitedly. "Do you think we can do it? Oh, we've got to do it!"

Sudden hope shone in her eyes, and the light of a great determination.

"What shall we do?" she queried eagerly. "Shall we try to get the keys of the dungeon from Wade?"

"No," declared Mary, "I've got a better plan. While you were being held prisoner we were almost crazy here, not knowing what had happened to you, or what we could do. In fact, there was nothing we could do but wait, and to keep from going quite mad I diverted my mind by exploring the castle. And—oh, Sandy—there *is* a secret passageway!"

"Is there really?" Sandy grasped her companion's hand excitedly. "Oh, Mary, where is it? Do you think it might lead to the dungeons?"

"It begins here in this very room!" declared Mary, her eyes round with excitement. "And it leads downward! I shouldn't be at all surprised if it reached to somewhere near the dungeons. I haven't had time to explore it except for just a little way, because Aunt Honora called me only a few moments after I started down, but we'll try it right now, Sandy, and maybe you'll be able to help Nikky escape!"

"Oh, Mary!" breathed Sandy. "You're the best, dearest, sweetest friend a girl ever had! I don't know whether—"

She broke off as there came the sound of a knock at the door.

"It's Aunt Honora!" whispered Mary.

With two quick movements, Sandy scrambled into the bed and pulled the covers up to her chin, while Mary went to open the door.

AUNT HONORA strode majestically in, casting a stern glance at Mary's flushed, excited face.

"I came to see about Sandy's wound," she said.

Sandy opened her eyes and smiled. "Oh, it's all right, Aunt Honora," she assured the older woman. "It has been well bandaged, and it doesn't hurt much now—really it doesn't!"

"Very well. Try to sleep if you can. And, Mary, don't keep her awake with your chatter."

She swept out, and the two conspirators clasped each other's hands.

"Just in time!" murmured Mary. "If she'd come after I'd opened the secret passageway it would have been just too bad. We couldn't have explained to her—she'll always side with Wade."

"Quick!" whispered Sandy, jumping down from the bed. "Where is the passageway?"

Mary beckoned her over to the huge stone fireplace that took up a large portion of one wall of the room.

"It's here," she whispered. "It was just by chance that I discovered the secret of the door—but look!"

She pressed on a certain place, where a bit of carving jutted out, and Sandy, watching breathlessly, saw one whole side of the enormous fireplace swing out like a huge stone door. Behind it yawned an empty, black hole.

Hand in hand the two girls crept down the ancient, winding stone stairs. Sandy had caught up a double candlestick as they left the bedroom, and the flickering light of the candles made grotesque, dancing shadows on the damp, moldy walls.

Down and down they went, frightened of the ghostly shadows and the bright eyes of the scurrying rats, but pushing bravely on. Sandy was impelled by love, and Mary would follow loyally wherever Sandy led.

They descended step after step, and still the stairs wound downward into blackness.

"We must be just about opposite the main hall of the castle," remarked Mary. "Oh, look, there's a little door!"

They tried the tiny opening and found that it was in the chimney breast of the huge fireplace in the great castle hall. They looked out into the room, to see that all was dark and silent.

"If I can get to Nikky," announced Sandy, "I'll bring him back here, and then I can let him out the main door. I'll have to lower the drawbridge, though, and then raise it again. I hope it won't make a lot of noise."

"I'll help you," promised Mary. "But we haven't found him yet."

"Come, then," whispered Sandy, and, closing the little door, they went on down the secret stairway.

At last, after what seemed hours, they reached bottom, only to find that the pasageway branched in two different directions.

"Which way?" asked Sandy in perplexity. "I haven't the faintest notion where the dungeons are, have you, Mary?"

"Of course not. Tell you what we'll

do. You have two candles in that candlestick. We'll each take one of them, and each explore a passageway. Whichever finds the way to the dungeon, or the nearest to it, must call. But if you find Nikky and I don't hear you call, don't wait for me—get him out of the castle as quickly as you can. It must be nearly morning now."

Sandy agreed to her plan and handed her one of the candles. She had not stopped to think whether she would be frightened, all alone in this dark, strange place which might hold the secrets of centuries.

With bravely reassuring words to each other, the two girls parted.

Sandy hurried along the passageway which turned and twisted bewilderingly, but had no more branches. Her single candle cast an eerie light, hardly dispersing the Stygian blackness.

When she had gone on, for miles it seemed, she suddenly came up against a blank wall—the end of the passage. Was this only a blind alley, then, which she had followed to no purpose?

Then she saw that, instead of a wall, it was a door. There were rusty, mold-covered hinges, and a handle.

She boldly grasped the handle and pulled the door toward her. It moved creakingly, protestingly, but it did move. Through it came a gust of cold air, and her candle went out.

"OH!" moaned Sandy to herself. "And I forgot to bring matches!"

What lay before her? Suddenly she heard a sound, like a low, muffled groan. Where was she? Had she stumbled on the dwelling place of the ghost of the castle? Or was that a human voice?

"Nikky!" she called, her voice shaking with terror. "Nikky!"

"Sandy!"

His voice was so near her that she jumped. "Sandy!" he cried again. "Sandy, is that you, or am I dreaming again?"'

"Oh, Nikky!" She rushed forward, headlong into the room before her. "Nikky, I've come to help you escape. Where are you?"

"Here on the floor. They've trussed me up till I can't move. Oh, Sandy, bless you for coming—bless you for the angel that you are!"

The girl's eager hands fumbled for his prostrate form, found him, tore anxiously at his bonds.

"I forgot to bring a knife," she told him regretfully. "I forgot everything, I guess, but getting to you, so that you can escape. You must leave the country at once, as Wade will be very vindictive when he—when he finds out."

"There is a knife in my pocket," Nikky told her. "Try to get at it."

Sandy found the knife and managed to cut his bonds, working carefully in the darkness. At last he was free, and he stood up. She knew that he was stretching his cramped muscles.

Suddenly she felt herself seized in his arms. "Sandy," he whispered passionately, "what is this Wade to you?"

"He—he was to have been my husband," faltered Sandy slowly. "But—"

"But now he never will be," cried Nikky joyously, holding her tightly against his breast. "You came to me, Sandy, to save me. You love me—admit that you love me!"

"You—you will leave the country?" asked Sandy. "You will wait somewhere for—for me?"

"Sandy!" His eager lips were on hers, in a long kiss that shook her soul.

After many minutes—or perhaps it

was years—she withdrew herself gently from his arms.

"Come," she said. "You must get away at once. There's no time to lose! Have you any matches?"

"Perhaps." He fumbled in his pockets, and at last produced one. They lit the candle, shielding it from the damp drafts of the dungeon. Sandy, glancing up, met the loving glance of his dark eyes, and joy surged through her heart as she lifted her face again for his kiss.

At last, hand in hand, they were hurrying along the passage. Sandy was happy—what did it matter that Nikky was a gypsy, a fugitive? She loved him, and she belonged to him forever and ever.

At the foot of the narrow stairway they halted.

"Mary!" called Sandy. "Oh, Mary! I've found him!"

There was no answer, and Sandy turned to Nikky in perplexity. "Do you suppose she could have gone back up the stairs?" she asked. "But she told me not to wait, if I found you. Come, I'll get you safely out of the castle, and then I'll come back and hunt for her."

They went up the stairs, and Sandy opened the little door that led out into the castle hall. They emerged, dusty but triumphant—to find the hall lighted as if for a wedding feast, and Wade and Aunt Honora confronting them!

"SANDY!" cried Wade, striding forward angrily. "Have you lost your senses?"

"A pretty thing to do!" put in Aunt Honora. "Cavorting around in secret passageways, in the dead of night, with a low, common gypsy! And we would never have known if it hadn't been for this girl here, who crept into the castle in the confusion to-night and hid herself here. She saw you and Mary, and heard your conversation."

Sandy, looking beyond Aunt Honora, saw Nina standing there, with a look of malicious triumph on her dark face.

"I have my revenge," muttered the gypsy girl. "The law will take him, but I would rather see him dead than belonging to you!"

"You little traitor!" retorted Sandy. "You have betrayed him—but I will save him again—a million times! I will sell the castle, and spend every cent I possess to buy him from the hands of the law!"

"Sandy!" cried Wade furiously. "Have you completely lost your senses? Have you gone crazy?"

Sandy looked at him defiantly. "No, Wade," she retorted clearly. "I have just found them. I know now where my heart is. I am sorry, Wade, but I do not love you. I never did, and I cannot marry you. I love Nikky."

She stepped back into the shelter of Nikky's quickly outstretched arms.

"You—what?" gasped Wade and Aunt Honora together.

"I love Nikky, and I'm going to marry him," Sandy told them calmly.

Nikky's arms pressed closer about her, and she smiled up into his eager, happy face.

"But you can't!" cried Aunt Honora. "Why, he's only a bandit, a vagabond, a common, thieving gypsy."

"Aunt Honora!" Sandy faced her bravely. "You and Wade have run my life for me long enough. Now I'm going to do as I please—do what I know is right. I am going to marry the man I love!"

"Sandy, you can't do this!" Wade was blustering, angry. "Think of your position, your fortune! Why, you'll be

the laughing stock of both Italy and America! Give up this crazy dream and marry me as you promised to do!"

Sandy merely turned from them all, looking up into Nikky's glowing black eyes.

Suddenly there came a sound, a series of sounds, from near the fireplace, the secret door opened with a crash, and Mary burst into view.

"Well, am I glad to get back to civilization!" she gasped. "Oh, Sandy—you found him, then? But what's going on here?"

She looked from one to the other of the intense group, but her eyes rested longest on Nikky, and suddenly she stepped forward, staring at him.

"Why!" she exclaimed. "It's Nikky Dawson!"

"What?" There was a chorus of exclamations, but Nikky gave Mary a friendly smile, and clasped Sandy closer to him.

"Mary!" gasped Aunt Honora. "What do you mean?"

"Why, didn't you recognize him?" asked Mary excitedly. "But of course you couldn't—you and Sandy refused to go to the musicale with me that night in Boston." Suddenly she became very formal. "Allow me to introduce," she cried, "Nikky Dawson, famous violinist, of Italian-American parentage, who has been a social lion in America, but a gypsy king in his own country!"

"Nikky!" cried Sandy. "Is it true? Why didn't you tell me?"

"I had inherited a desire for revenge, but it soon died," he told her. "I wanted to win your love—just as a gypsy. Oh, it is all true enough."

"It is true," put in Nina savagely. "It is his American blood that turns him to an American girl, scorning an honest gypsy maiden!" She turned and dashed out of the hall, and they could hear her rattling down the drawbridge.

"Come, Wade," said Aunt Honora coldly. "I am going to pack, and you had better do the same. We leave for America in the morning!"

"Not me!" cried Mary. "I'm going to stay here with Sandy and finish exploring that secret passageway. I got lost in it, and thought I never would get back here. But I must go and wash some of this dust off." With a roguish look at Sandy, she dashed away.

They were alone. Nikky drew the blue beads from his pocket.

"They were not stolen," he said. "Will you wear them now, Sandy, darling?"

She nodded, and he slipped them over her head, then drew her again into his arms.

"My gypsy lover!" she whispered, as his lips crushed down on hers.

It was Lura who added the finishing touch—a pair of men's slippers before the fire

The House That Love Built

Smiling lies decoyed him, false love gave fair promises. But in a little dream house lay a message. Would he see?

By Madeleine Sharps Buchanan

LURA MARLOW was the assistant window decorator at Webb & Gayley's. Any one who saw Lura would have guessed right away that she was something like that, she was so adorably picturesque and pretty herself.

Miss Carlson was the head decorator; but while the rooms that she arranged each week in the wide windows

of the big furniture store were arresting and artistic, it was Lura who put the heart into them and made them live. It was Lura who brought tears to the eyes of the man and woman living in a ready-made furnished apartment, an extra throb to the racing hearts of the young man and his sweetie *en route* to the movies, and a sob to the throat of the older couple who had got far from their first and ever beloved little house, dreamed of and furnished "together."

Coming upon those brightly lighted windows, arranged by Miss Carlson but created by Lura Marlow, a goodly portion of the hurrying public was affected like this; but many of them would have simply carried away ideas and left no address had it not been for Lura.

Miss Carlson had come to Kenderport from a New York house, highly recommended, and they had secured her at a much reduced salary because her ailing parents needed her at home. Lura was just the daughter of old Wayne Marlow, who had died a clerk in Webb & Gayley's employ.

When one of the big windows, during county fair week, was furnished as a kitchen, with snowy tables, blue linoleum, and a glittering array of aluminum, it was Lura who set a loaf of bread on the shining board on the largest table and flung a mussed-looking apron, of the sort that every bride has in her hope chest, over the back of an immaculate little chair, as if the doorbell had rung in the midst of getting supper. And when, during Thanksgiving week one window became a handsome dining room, it was Lura who insisted upon a real turkey instead of the dirty waxen one that Miss Carlson had meant to place on the old blue platter.

"Make it real," Lura pleaded, with dreams in her lovely eyes. "You can't fool people."

And in the lovely rose-tinted bedroom it was Lura who turned down the spreads on the twin beds, set a dish of candy under the reading lamp, dropped an open book near one pillow, and flung a fluffy negligee over the foot of the other bed.

"Make it homey and natural," she begged, with those lovely eyes looking far away into the home she hoped to have.

AND so it came about, one March morning, that Lura was adding her usual human touch to a delightful living room set which Miss Carlson had arranged the night before behind the dropped canvas of the huge windows. The touch this time was a smoking stand drawn close to a comfortable lounging chair, with cigars and pipe upon it, and a pair of good-looking house slippers set before the mock fire in the big grate.

"Take them out!" snapped Miss Carlson, when she saw them. "Those slippers are just ridiculous!"

"They will appeal to every man," said Lura; "and the men have the pocketbooks."

The slippers, however, pretending to get warm before that mock fire, were just like Lura, and so were all the other gay pretensions. The public knew it, for these things were the expression of Lura herself. She projected it right through the glass, and those who stopped to stare and dream and plan and hope perceived it. It was more than just a furnished window when Lura got through with it. It was home—a chord that every one who passed in the street could strike.

To Lura, playing with those win-

dows was like reaching out for the gossamer wings of some dream that always eluded her—the dream of love and home that she yearned to find.

The window game that she played with herself was all right as long as she kept her back to the street; but this morning, after placing the slippers and turning on a gay lamp, she swung about, for some reason or other, and found herself looking into the eyes of a young man who was gazing in at the homelike picture into which Lura had just breathed life.

The young man was no stranger. Lura knew him well, but he had no idea who she was. Why should he have? Parry Grange, who was general manager of his father's big drug business across the street, was also a member of the town's exclusive younger set. He would never know Lura Marlow, even though they had the bond of youth in common; but Lura knew him. Every morning at nine o'clock the big, blond young man parked his handsome roadster before the show windows of Webb & Gayley's, as per a satisfactory arrangement with the traffic cop.

The girls in the furniture store called him Apollo, and more than one dreamed dreams about him. Lura had noted his arrival each morning with impersonal admiration. She had the same sort of admiration for fur coats in winter, while she shivered with her soft little chin buried in the imitation squirrel collar of her cloth suit. Somehow there was always a pane of glass between Lura and everything she wanted.

And now, when Parry Grange actually paused in the rain and looked in, she regarded him just as she regarded those fur coats—with a sickening hopelessness heavy with longing.

Every now and then Parry paused and looked at Miss Carlson's sets, but this was only the second time Lura had been caught in the middle of the scene. It seemed as if he did not see her, for he was looking at the slippers that she had set before the fire. Next to herself, Lura would have wished him to notice those.

Perhaps he was going to be married. There were rumors of the attention he was paying Doris Porter. Lura curled her rose petal mouth. Girls in Parry's set did not admire aprons, pipes, or slippers set before a fire for the weary head of the home!

"He is as far from this as I am from a fur coat," she sighed, as she slipped from the window and hurried to her little desk, which was quite hidden by the mahogany majesty of Miss Carlson's, just as Lura herself was obscured behind the large and important head decorator.

Lura would never have anything like that living room set, she felt sure. For one thing, she had no money. Jim Brodley, her sister's husband, owed her a good bit. She was always helping him out, although she did not like him. The twins had had grippe with complications the preceding winter, and Jim had not repaid her for the help she gave him with the doctor's bills. This year he had not been able to meet his taxes.

Although Lura did not like Jim or the twins—dirty, noisy boys of eight—and though she had scant love for her sister, she clung to them because they were all she had. That was why she went on living with the Brodleys.

THE day after she placed those slippers in the living room set, Lura arrived at the store to find the big desk near her own securely

locked, and the revolving chair before it empty. For a moment she stared uncomprehendingly. It did not cause her any temporary paralysis to miss her superior's tall frame from its usual throne. It was just the sight of the chair that she so desired to occupy empty there before her, but as unattainable as Parry Grange, or the home for which she longed, or the fur coat that she had never had.

At eleven o'clock Mrs. Fitch came to Lura. Mrs. Fitch was the head of that department.

"Miss Marlow, you are to go in and interview Mrs. and Miss Porter," she said. "Miss Carlson is at home with a severe cold, and you will have to take her place. Miss Porter is marrying young Mr. Grange, I believe, and she is to furnish the remodeled Christie place. Between you and me, she doesn't look as if she could furnish a chicken coop."

Lura sat still after Mrs. Fitch had flurried away, her soul feeling like a ball that has been bounced from one wall to another. Her chance had come to furnish a real home, to take Miss Carlson's place; but there had come with it the dreadful knowledge that it was to be the home of the man whom she suddenly knew she loved—the man for whom she had unconsciously been furnishing all those window sets. He was going to marry Doris Porter!

She recalled the society girl's ethereal beauty, her doll-like prettiness. Did that match young Grange's jaw, his strong lip line, his straight, keen gaze? But even if Lura had been trying for months to talk to him through a window pane, to get her longing and loneliness through to him, what could he ever be to her? Where would she ever meet Parry Grange?

The old Christie place! As Lura passed down the hall to the room where the head decorator received customers, her brain was filled with ingle nooks, latticed windows, and old carved furniture tinted honey-gold. If only she could forget herself and make a home for the man she loved — the home she longed to share with him! Surely she could get her message over to him now, in every corner of the home where he and his love were to start life together!

Doris, the bride-to-be, was the first person Lura saw when she entered the room. A slight, golden-haired vision in gray. Miss Porter sat where the electric light fell upon her delicate face. It made Lura's heart ache to watch Parry's betrothed, and she glanced from Doris to Mrs. Porter.

Then she noticed something puzzling and mysterious. There was a pleading wistfulness in Mrs. Porter's eyes as she looked at Lura, and after a moment Lura understood what she was trying to do. She was endeavoring to get a message over to the assistant decorator, just as Lura had been sending hers through the plate glass windows out front. As yet Lura could not read the message. She only knew that it was there.

"Mrs. Fitch told me you were going to furnish the Christie place," said Lura in her sweet young voice.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Porter eagerly. "Mr. Grange has given the place to my daughter. He has always admired your window sets so much, and he told us to come here and buy what we need. The house is to be a surprise to him, but my—my daughter is not as domestic as he thinks she is; and dear Parry is crazy about that sort of thing, and has placed the entire house in her hands."

Lura kept the curl from her lip, and

by dropping the heavy fringes of her eyes she hid the scorn that flashed into them. This silly doll baby furnishing the delightful old Christie place! Apparently Parry did not know how silly she was.

"I just don't know anything about a house," admitted Miss Porter, with a little apologetic laugh. "I think that in these days women aren't so clever about that sort of thing."

"That's true," said Lura sweetly. "A permanent wave, now, or whether or not to take a partner out of a no-trump bid—that's more like it."

"Do you know the Christie place, Miss Marlow?" asked Mrs. Porter.

DID she know it? Lura bit her lip. The Christie place, like Parry Grange, had been a thing for which she had secretly longed. Recently an artist had done it over and offered it for sale. So Parry Grange had liked it, too!

"Oh, yes, I know it well," said pretty Lura primly.

She closed the door upon her dream house through a mist of tears

As she spoke, Mr. Tatlow, the buyer for that department, entered the room.

"I have just called Miss Carlson's home," he told Mrs. Porter, "and they tell me she does not know when she will be able to return to the office. She is quite ill. Now, if there is any hurry about doing this house—"

"The wedding is to be in June," murmured Mrs. Porter softly.

Lura saw what the very word meant to the bride's mother—roses, canopies, the "Lohengrin" chorus, priestly benedictions, dreams realized! It was not her husband who had brought that shadow of tragedy into Mrs. Porter's face.

"And we want Miss Marlow to do the house," the older woman went on.

"If you have no objection, I will run out to-day and look it over," suggested Lura with soft eagerness. "I'll submit sketches to you afterward."

Mrs. Porter took from her handsome beaded bag a huge old iron key, and Lura received it as if it would unlock the doors of Paradise. Doris had stepped to the door with Tatlow, and Mrs. Porter seized Lura's soft arm.

"My dear," she whispered, "I can trust you. If you decide to help us, it will not just be helping. You will have to do it all. My daughter is not interested, but dear Parry thinks she is. She is so clever about that sort of thing! He is the man we would choose for her out of the world, but if he once finds that she is not what he thinks she is—you see, he comes of old-fashioned people, and he is an old-fashioned young man, after my own heart. Doris has had so many chances, and every one she has broken like a brittle thing in her fingers, just from fickleness or laziness. It isn't loyal to say this, I'm afraid, but I must trust some one. I can't have her lose Parry!"

So this was the message! The mother wanted to hide her daughter behind Lura's magic gift of home making! Parry was not to know who had created his home. How long could those keen eyes be deceived? Alas, perhaps until after the honeymoon!

After all, what difference would it make? What could Lura be to Parry Grange? Just nothing.

But could she deceive him? Was that fair? She was playing a real game now, not through a window pane, fooling about with doll furniture and a paper fire stirred up by an electric fan!

"It will be a joy to fix that lovely little home," she told the mother.

The rest must be on the knees of the gods!

THE Christie house was not large, and it was not small. Its dimensions, as well as everything else about it, were perfect. Its low, spread out effect gave it an appearance of greater size than it really possessed. The big central chimney was red, like the roof, and so was the trim of the wide, old-fashioned door and of the latticed windows creased into the creamy walls here and there like jewels. A cluster of green banked the door at each side, and odd old lamps sprouted at right and left of the entrance.

As Lura entered the house that afternoon, she acted in no businesslike fashion, and it was just as well that no one saw her. She leaned against the seat that bordered the long, low window beside the front door, and cried. Why should this come to Doris Porter, who had brought tragedy to her mother, and who would bring more of it to Parry Grange? "Oh, little house, I want you so!" sobbed Lura.

But at last she got hold of herself, crushed down her longing, and started on a tour of exploration. As she went, the house lost its bareness and bloomed with a Chinese rug here, cretonnes there — soft grays lighted with rose, old gold, and crisp green—rainbow rugs, and blue pottery. As she walked about, paper in hand, not only did her eyes furnish the house, but they saw roses everywhere, lilacs peeping in at latticed windows, and hawthorns pressing against the walls, strung with pink blooms!

If only she could have been the woman that Parry Grange was to marry! Then her little home would not only have been started beautifully, it would have lived on beautifully; but she was to cement Parry's love for this empty-headed girl. She was to deceive him with her own gift of home making.

When at last Lura locked the door behind her and hurried down the path, she glanced back, and it seemed as if every beloved window blossomed with light. All the way home in the bus her soul seemed to cry out, though she sat stiffly erect, staring straight ahead of her.

"I am draping roses on the cross he is to carry," she told herself bitterly. "I am hanging his tragedy with flowers. How can I do it?"

Early the next day Lura took her sketches and notes to Mrs. Porter, and the two women sat in that lady's handsome study with their delighted heads bent over the home that Lura was making.

"Doris is out," said Mrs. Porter apologetically. "She is like all the young people to-day—so irresponsible! My dear, you have the gift. These sketches make me cry. I never had anything like this, because we never were in the middle path where real happiness lies. We jumped from poverty to riches. Parry could have started just as we live here, but I think—I fear—he sees what it has done for Doris."

Lura nodded grimly. Doris would never make good, no matter how they deceived Parry. They could manage it, perhaps, up to the altar steps, but not beyond them. It was shameful!

"I will not tell Mr. Grange. You need not worry," said Lura softly, answering those pleading eyes.

No, she would not tell him; but what about those wordless messages, the voiceless plea that the Christie house would make for her?

Miss Carlson kept her room while the furnishing and the decorating went on; and Lura lost her grief in the joy of making a home for Parry, although tragedy always walked close beside her. She had an awful fear that he might not get her message, might not know that it was Lura who loved him so desperately, who had made the home for him, and not Doris.

The house was almost finished when Mrs. Porter telephoned Lura that Parry Grange could not wait any longer to see it.

"I think he feels sure that Doris has done the entire thing herself," she bubbled over the wire.

It was not necessary for Lura to accompany the Porters and Parry Grange through the little dream home, but she could not resist seeing Parry go over it for the first time. She must be there when he first entered that charming old door.

And so, her soul twisted with agony, she was waiting in her swagger little spring suit when he stopped for her in his car.

Doris sat in front with her *fiancé*,

and Mrs. Porter welcomed Lura on the back seat. Knowing the spells she had woven into the beloved Christie house, Lura felt like a cheat and a thief; but she would rather cheat Mrs. Porter than the man she loved.

As they walked up the path to the front door, Doris hung upon her lover's arm, laughing up into his face, although she had not once been in the house since Lura took it over.

It was Doris, too, who took the big iron key and set it in the lock, while Mrs. Porter squeezed Lura's hand. Lura understood. Her partnership with Doris's mother was over, and now the little dream house had things all its own way. Was the man she loved too much blinded by the baby doll on his arm to get her own heart messages?

But he saw the charm of it, anyhow. His fine young face glowed as Lura's had the first time she entered the house. Lura watched, praying that he would see more before it was too late. Oh, would not some kind power let him know that Doris would never fit into that dear little home?

Mrs. Porter kept Lura's hand, however, whispering her gratitude, her admiration, while the girl yearned after those two just ahead. This was her hour, and she must be with Parry when he first looked upon her work.

Suddenly, stepping ahead of Mrs. Porter, she saw him bend over Doris in the dainty little breakfast nook. He was going to kiss her! Oh, that Lura could look at that and still live! A twisting agony wrenched her heart; but before she could move away she caught something he was saying.

"Doris, you have charmed me with this. Nothing else that you could have done would have pleased me so much. This is home!"

As she turned aside with the gushing Mrs. Porter, Lura longed to wreck the place, to tear down the dainty curtains, to smash the delightful lamps. The little house had been untrue to her. It had not carried her message to the man she adored. He thought his silly Doris had done it all.

Mrs. Porter touched her arm.

"It is so much lovelier than I thought it would be!" she said softly. "You certainly have the gift. I thank you, dear Miss Marlow, for letting my child take the credit."

Lura turned aside a little breathlessly. The pain at her heart was almost unbearable.

"I—you must excuse me just now," she murmured. "I have an appointment."

LURA went out into the warming sunshine and back to the office, her head held high, a pulse beating in her white throat. How often has proud young tragedy hastened through the golden sunshine of a spring afternoon! For Lura Marlow life was ended.

Mrs. Fitch met her at the door of her office.

"Dear Lura, we are in such a fix!" she complained.

"A collection has been taken up to buy flowers for Miss Carlson, and Mr. Tatlow was to take them himself. He's been called to a meeting, and the lovely things are dying on her desk. I can't take them, for she hates me. Will you see to it for us?"

"I suppose so," said Lura wearily.

It didn't make much difference what she did now. She was tired of living. She felt stunned and useless. How much she had trusted that little Christie house! She had felt sure that it would tell Parry the truth.

A grumbling invalid mother showed

Lura into the sick woman's room, and the girl entered with her arms full of flowers, looking a lovely picture to Miss Carlson.

"I hear you are making good in my absence," said the decorator, when her mother had set the flowers in vases and left the two alone.

"Oh, I'm trying," replied Lura listlessly.

Miss Carlson leaned forward unexpectedly and seized Lura's arm with one hand, while with the other she pointed to the picture of a young man on the bureau.

"You take your chance when it comes, Lura," she said bitterly. "Don't step back for anybody. If I had taken mine, I wouldn't be working for Webb & Gayley to-day. I could have married him, but for reasons I thought right I sacrificed myself and him. A fool thing to do! Neither he nor anybody else is helping me to finish out my life. I'm for myself now. I've learned, and you'd better learn. I hope you've made the best of what my illness has given you."

Lura stared at the young man. Just above his picture was a framed motto:

TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE

Miss Carlson, who hadn't the sense to hang an apron over a kitchen chair in a set, or to throw an open book on a satin bed, had hung that motto over the picture of the man she had loved!

Little tingling sensations shot all over Lura, like the stirring of a temporarily suspended circulation.

"I've always liked you," Miss Carlson went on; "and I've been thinking a lot, lying here. I've been alone with that picture. When I saw you coming in here, so lovely to look at, with dreams in your eyes, I wanted to tell you to grab your happiness when it comes, no matter what fool ideas you may have against it!"

Lura walked home in a daze. Was she being true to herself when she permitted the man she loved to make a hideous mistake? Why should she deceive him and shield Doris Porter? Suppose she was taken sick some day, and had to lie at the Brodleys' thinking about this bitter mistake she had made!

The little house had not carried her message over to him; but there was another idea in Lura's head. He would be a dumb-bell indeed if he didn't understand this one, and she wouldn't have to break faith with Mrs. Porter to send it to him; but as Lura entered her demure little room she knew that she would never let Parry Grange go to the altar not knowing that she, and not his bride, had made his home for him!

AT about eight o'clock that night she went back to Webb & Gayley's. She let herself in with her own key and stood for a moment in darkness, listening to the beating of her heart.

The great store was not entirely empty, for there were a few workers on the top floor, and a watchman was about somewhere; but Lura did not care who saw her. Passing down the long aisles, she came at last to the living room set, which she had not allowed them to take from the window. It had been permitted to stay because it appeared to get the married people, that set!

The big store seemed friendly to-night. That was because she was young and vital and full of courage. Would it be so friendly when she grew to be like Miss Carlson, her chances gone? No, then her work and the store would seem like an ogre who

could never be satisfied. She vowed that day should never come. Thank Heaven that she had taken those flowers to the senior decorator! She had needed the older woman's quivering finger, the young man's pictured face, the bare room where Miss Carlson lay after making so many homes lovely, that old motto, to wake her up!

In another moment Lura had entered the set, had crossed it, had stooped to pick up the house slippers set before the mock fire, and had fled with them.

The spot where they had been before the fireplace looked bare and empty; and that was just what Lura wanted. Not for anything would she have placed another pair of slippers there.

A hand fell on her shoulder, and the kindly watchman smiled in her eyes.

"Ain't ye making a mistake, miss, taking them house slippers from before the fire?" he asked.

"Well, no, Malcolmson, I would hardly call it a mistake," smiled Lura radiantly.

Straight from the store to her little house of dreams went Lura, let herself in with the extra key that she always kept with her, and touched into life one or two of the lamps in the living room. How delightful it was with the lamps lighted at night! Lura pressed her warm fingers to her cold cheeks and looked at it tearfully.

Then her heart gave a jump. Beside the fireplace a big chair had been drawn, with a smoking stand beside it, and upon the smoking stand actually a pipe and a half smoked cigar! Consciously or unconsciously Parry Grange had copied her human touch in the living room set!

Kneeling swiftly, she laid the house slippers before the fire, just as they had been placed in Webb & Gayley's window. She had written her initials on the job—had signed her name in a corner of the picture!

"I'll be true to myself and him!" Lura told herself with a shaky laugh, as she turned out the lamps and locked the door behind her.

ALL the next morning the bare spot in the window set almost screamed at Lura. She kept away from the window; but a wave of indignation kept sweeping her when she thought of Doris Porter telling smiling lies to the man she loved.

How long would it be before Parry saw those slippers? Doris would tell him that she placed them there; but would it go over? He was too smart for that!

It was just after luncheon that Mrs. Fitch told her that Miss Porter and Mr. Grange were waiting to see her. Lura felt as if it might be the village constable and the county sheriff. Guilt was in her heart, coupled with a high pride and a vast daring. Every girl has a right to fight for her happiness!

Accustomed to wordless messages, Lura noted the anguished appeal in Doris Porter's eyes the moment she saw her. The girl was white and nervous, and was trying to appear natural. Parry, too, regarded Lura in a strange fashion.

She was not long left in doubt, for Parry spoke at once in his frank, pleasing way.

"Miss Marlow, we have come down to look at some Molly Pitcher tables. Miss Porter is to pick one out. I won't have a thing to do with the house, since she has made such a splendid job of it. I have merely suggested this table, and I will appreciate it if you will let her have her own way about it."

Lura knew then! Doris Porter could not pick out a Molly Pitcher table from a kitchen sink. Had he seen the slippers? He must have!

"Parry, she has exquisite taste!" cried Doris. "You will help me, won't you, Miss Marlow?"

pay the price of her lies and her deceit!

Doris's voice came to her eagerly:

"Miss Marlow, can I speak to you for a moment?"

But Parry cut in teasingly.

"Now, Dorry, you shan't run off to

Doris fingered her mesh bag significantly. Bribery! Lura lifted her chin

"My dear, it is your taste I want in our home," said Parry. "Your mother and you have both assured me that you planned and arranged every detail of it, and I call you a genius. I'm a lucky chap! Mighty few men have such a home to start out in. Now just show us the tables, if you please, Miss Marlow."

If it had not been for Miss Carlson and her young man and her motto, Lura would have helped Doris; but as she met the eyes of the man she loved so desperately, she determined to let things take their course. Let this girl

talk business! Stay right here and tell me what half this wild-looking stuff is. I had no idea you were up on this sort of thing."

Lura's heart was racing madly. She knew that he had seen the slippers and understood their message; that perhaps the little dream house had not betrayed her. She yearned over him until her throat ached.

A Molly Pitcher table! To the excited Lura every Molly Pitcher table on the floor seemed immediately to wave a flag.

It would have been easy to give

Doris a hint, but Lura knew it would be no use now. She guessed that Parry Grange had a list of things she had filled his home with, and that he intended to ask Doris about them. What about the early American wing chairs, the Windsor chairs, the lowboys and highboys, and the original Phyfe? Oh, there were hundreds of traps he could set, and she would not play him false!

"Parry, I absolutely refuse to do any more of this!" snapped Doris at last. "If you want anything else put into the house, you must do it yourself. You must realize the work and thought I've given it. I'm worn out. Miss Marlow and you can do the rest!"

Lura thought Parry must hear the little clash of steel as the eyes of the two girls met. Doris knew that Lura had refused to help her, and she would die fighting.

"Nonsense!" said Parry sharply. "If you don't help me now, dear, I shall think you fooled me all along. It is hard enough for me to believe that you have all this exquisite taste and wonderful knowledge in that charming head of yours."

Lura's heart still danced. He knew! He would not be deceived, he would not have his life broken! Oh, if he never looked at her, she was glad of that—so glad that she could have gone down on her knees among all the puzzling period furniture and offered up a prayer!

"Now, come, Doris, and pick out the Molly Pitcher we want," Parry went on gayly. "Heavens, I never saw so many tables!"

Doris stamped her pretty foot and flushed angrily.

"Parry, I told you I would not do anything more!" she flared. "Pick out your silly table yourself!"

"But tell me which you would prefer," begged Parry, his eyes twinkling at Lura.

"If Miss Marlow shows us a few, I will," pouted the bride-to-be.

"Very well, you indicate to her which ones you wish to examine," nodded Parry.

Doris could contain herself no longer. She bit her pink lip.

"Parry Grange," she said, speaking very low, "to hear you any one would think you've got an idea that I don't know what a Molly Pitcher table *is!*"

"Doris Porter," returned Parry gravely, "that is just what I do think; and there's a lot more. I don't believe you know any more about an original Phyfe, or early American stuff, than you do about these tables! I don't believe you had a darned thing to do with our home! I bet anything I own you never saw it until you went there with me yesterday! If I am wrong, all you have to do is pick out the things I name, and I will apologize until my dying day; but I know darned well you can't!"

LURA was a soft-hearted little creature, and to see another girl cornered like this was agony. She had to shut her eyes and think hard about Miss Carlson and the motto. She would not be true to herself if she lied to Parry. Oh, how she loved him! And so Lura was silent, a slender blue-clad figure with a lovely, transfigured face.

Doris Porter still had a shred of faith in Lura, and turned to her with a radiant smile.

"Miss Marlow, you can tell this ridiculous *fiancé* of mine that I, and I alone, planned and furnished his home for him."

She spoke in a silky voice, and then she made a fatal mistake. She signifi-

cantly fingered her gold mesh hand bag!

On the instant Lura became an image of stone. Her cold eyes met those of the other girl squarely.

"I would much rather not be drawn into this, Miss Porter," she said, with hauteur that sat oddly on her soft youthfulness.

Parry Grange made a quick little movement. Whether it meant relief or disappointment Lura could not say, since she dared not look at him. Her wretched eyes were fastened firmly on the cabriole legs of a Queen Anne cabinet. She never afterward saw one of those cabinets without the dreadful uncertainty of that moment returning to her.

"Don't ask Miss Marlow to fib for you, Doris," said Parry in a new, strange voice. "You cannot bribe her to do so. I have known from the first that you had nothing to do with furnishing our home."

Doris Porter's head was high, while two crimson spots burned in her smooth cheeks. Looking at her, Lura seemed again to hear her mother's voice:

"Doris has had so many chances, and every one she has broken like some brittle thing in her fingers."

"If all you wanted was a decorator, a kind of paid painter and animated furniture store, instead of a wife, Parry Grange, it's well we found it out in time!" Doris was saying shrilly. "I'd smother, living with you! Here is Miss Marlow. She did it all. She'll pick out a Molly Pitcher table for you, with a Lura thrown in for good measure!"

Lura could stand no more. With a murmured apology she turned and fled, dashing into the orderly calm of Miss Carlson's little reception room, where she sank trembling upon a divan and buried her hot cheeks in her hands. Doris's shrill, angry voice still rang in her ears.

How long she sat there she never knew; but a step at the door roused her, and she turned swiftly to meet Parry Grange's keen but slightly amused gaze. He did not look like a heartbroken young man.

"A Molly Pitcher table seems like a silly thing to break an engagement, doesn't it?" he asked Lura gently.

"Oh, but perhaps you can make it up!" she replied hypocritically.

"No," said Parry Grange quietly. "The table is not entirely responsible. It has been coming on for some time. You see, I am a domestic sort of chap, I guess. My boyhood home was broken up early, and I'm hungry for one of my own. I've known from the first that you did every bit of the Christie house. It beats like a human heart, and it's living and warm, like those window sets that I've been looking in at for months and months. I think it was the window sets that got me engaged to Doris; and the window sets were you, as I knew the moment I set foot in the Christie house after you worked your spell upon it. Of course, it was the thing to do to see how far Doris and her mother would go with their deception. You didn't have to put a pair of slippers before my fire to tell me this. I knew those slippers right away. They've left a mighty va cant place in your window set!"

Lura's beautiful face was flaming, and she was suddenly afraid of Parry Grange's eyes.

She rose swiftly.

"Why—I never expected—" she stammered.

But Parry spoke evenly. He was quite sure of himself now.

"You did! Let us be honest. We've loved each other through that window pane for months, but I was too stupid to know it. I want a home, and you've made one for me — such a home as mighty few men ever see. Nothing shall ever be touched in it, darling, not even those old slippers. They'll just stand there and go to pieces, if you won't share the whole thing with me!"

Lura was afraid to understand. She felt that she must be dreaming. Things like this did not happen!

Then Parry put out his hands and seized hers. His earnest eyes held her alarmed gaze.

"I love you, Lura," he said deeply, tenderly. "When will you come to dinner with me and let me tell you the rest?"

"Oh!" gasped Lura. "Not for weeks and weeks! Why, this town would—the Porters would—"

"Nonsense!" said Parry Grange sternly, his arms going about her slight, resisting body. "I see I have not taken the right track with you at all. How long will it take you to get your hat?"

And before Lura could begin to reply his lips closed down upon hers in a breathless kiss.

Bagatelle

IS love a little something more
To be added to your store?
An acquisition, scarcely viewed
Until you're in the proper mood?

Of little moment—even then—
And if it did not come again
Could you go blithely on your way
Without a pain to mar your day?

Is love to you so mild and small?
Perhaps you don't want love at all?
What would you do if you could know
How—unsuspecting—long ago—

You crushed a flower in your hand . . .
I wonder—would you understand?

—Edith Manon Kelley

A Prince for Cinderella

Ethel Gallichan, a pretty little messenger girl, married the heir of the Earl of Louth, and now presides over a castle

By Dorothy Dayton

THE thrilling thing about being a modern girl is that anything may happen to you. The future is no longer an open book, wherein you marry the neighbor's son and settle down next door to practically the same routine you knew at home. To-day the future is a book with uncut leaves, whose pages may contain more thrilling and interesting things than those that happen to your favorite moving picture heroine.

Before the war the Prince and Cinderella story happened only in fairy tales. To-day it happens so often in real life that almost any girl, no matter how humble her circumstances, may find herself some day the mistress of a castle or a mansion. For to-day class distinctions are a thing of the past. A girl is no longer seriously handicapped by lack of wealth or social position, and she is admired and respected all the more if she works for her living.

Let a modern girl be pretty or charming or interesting, let her know how to make the best of her appearance, develop a snappy line of conversation, and all the doors of the wide world are open to her.

One of the prettiest Prince and Cinderella romances of the last few years is that of Ethel Gallichan and the future Earl of Louth, the scion of one of the oldest and proudest families of the English aristocracy.

Ethel lived in Jersey, that little out-of-the-way island in the English Channel, where the famous English beauty (your mother will remember her), Lily Langtry, also lived. And like the majority of modern girls, she worked for her living, first as a little messenger girl for the general post office of St. Heliers, and then as a telegraph messenger. Later she clerked in a department store, but when she met the eldest son of the Earl of Louth, she was selling magazines, newspapers, cigars, sodas and beers in her father's little hotel.

Ethel Gallichan wasn't exactly a beauty, but she had a great deal of charm. She was pert and modern, with bobbed black hair; and her Irish blue eyes always had a twinkle in them. She was one of those girls with a smile and a word for everybody; the sort of smile that is irresistible and friendly, and isn't reserved for men alone. She was one of the most popular girls in this little old-fashioned town. And her father and mother had rather old-fashioned standards about girls. Ethel had self-respect and pride. And that was one of the reasons why the Hon. Otway Plunkett's first quick admiration ripened into genuine love.

It was during the summer of 1926 that the Hon. Otway Randal Percy Oliver Plunkett, heir to the Earlship of Louth, first came to Jersey, and admired the courteous, smiling face of Ethel.

All men are interested in a pretty girl, of course. And the Hon. Otway Oliver Plunkett was no exception. He found it pleasant to chat with Ethel over his afternoon *apéritif*. But what really intrigued him about her was that in spite of her unfailing courtesy and friendliness, she wasn't flirtatious. And the fact that he was a future earl didn't seem to put her at all aflutter. Yet dozens of rich English and American heiresses, with hopes of becoming a countess, and presiding over the Castle of Louth, had acted differently. He was, in fact, quite fed up with title-hunting society girls, and pretty generally disillusioned about this thing called love.

Ethel wasn't. Ethel dreamed of romance, and in the back of her mind she had quite a definite picture of her particular prince, and what he would say to her, and what she would say to him. And she didn't care about him being rich or titled. She wanted a man who believed in love — old-fashioned love, that lasted. The future earl, of course, fitted the picture, in that he was tall, dark, and handsome. But he was cynical, too, and believed that all women thought only of money and position.

"Don't spend so much of your time talking to that earl, or whatever he is," her father cautioned her. "You don't suppose he'd even consider marrying a poor girl, working for a living, do you? People are beginning to comment."

And Ethel's reply was a typically snappy daughter-to-father comeback.

"Oh, papa, what an old-fashioned notion! Can't a girl talk to a man, even, without wanting to marry him? I'm as good as he is, but I wouldn't want to marry him. All he cares about is chasing around, and having a good time. What I want is a man with some character and stability—not a society man."

"Well, girls didn't act that way when your mother was young," he said fondly.

At the end of a couple of weeks Ethel told her admirer much the same thing. He was all packed up and ready to leave, but he acted as though he had something on his mind. He asked Ethel to go for a walk one moonlit evening. She refused.

"Oh, well," he said, "I just wanted to ask you to marry me."

Was he serious, or just spoofing? Ethel didn't know, but she said, "You should marry one of your own bad-and-glad-of-it aristocrats. Your father has had three wives, and I don't know how many lady friends. I wouldn't want to marry into anything like that."

"It isn't fair, in these democratic days, to judge a man by his parents. I didn't choose them," he replied. Just

The future Earl of Louth and his bride

about that time up wandered Ethel's father, and, curiously enough, he took the young man's part.

"That's true, daughter," said he, in his droll way, "but there are some Gallichans that are no credit to the name, for the matter of that." Ethel laughed, and so did the future earl. And she thought that was the end of it—a little sadly, too, because by now she realized that she was pretty much in love with the tall young man after all. At any rate, life seemed rather dull when he had left.

But there were letters, regular letters, through the winter, telling of a gay life in London, letters sprinkled casually with the names of the great and the near great, even the Prince of Wales. Oh, it would, she thought, be a dazzling life. Maybe he had been sincere.

Yet she wouldn't marry one of these men who quickly grew tired of their wives, and changed partners easily and often through the divorce courts. Could this gay, dashing young man really remain in love for any length of time? Could he understand what love might mean to *her?*

She resolved to put it to a test. She answered his letters with friendly gay little notes—and not too quickly. The whole town took an interest in the affair. All of the young men were more dazzled than ever by the pretty, sprightly Ethel. Of winter evenings they talked it over. Was he really serious, or just stringing the poor little girl along, they asked each other. And was she sincere in saying that she didn't care about wealth and social position?—at least not if it meant the sacrifice of her ideals. What a foolish

romantic girl she was, some of them said. But they admired her all the more for it.

Otway's father had a reputation for being very fascinating and equally fickle. Wouldn't he follow in his father's footsteps? Lord Louth's marriage to Otway's mother had not been a success. She was the brilliant and beautiful daughter of His Britannic Majesty's vice-consul of Biarritz, Eugenie Bellaire, known as the queen of King Edward's favorite amusement resort. If this sparkling, lovely woman, Ethel argued, hadn't been able to hold the father, what chance had she to hold the fascinating son, even if he were in earnest, as he said?

Ethel had inherited much of her father's stern character, and, in spite of her bobbed hair and short skirts, she respected his sterling principles, and his attitude toward life. And it was precisely these qualities that the future earl admired. As time went on, his devotion and respect for her increased. His visits to the little Isle of Jersey became more and more frequent, and more and more protracted.

It took the Honorable Otway Randal Percy Oliver Plunkett exactly two years to get little Ethel Gallichan, a mere nobody, selling magazines and drinks for a living, to say "Yes." And having worked so hard to win her—quite a new experience in the young nobleman's life—he probably appreciated her all the more. When she did get around to saying "Yes," he felt that she had conferred a great favor on him for consenting to become a countess.

And just to prove that he was as good a man as anybody, the future earl jumped behind the counter, donned an apron, mixed drinks, handed out cigars, and counted the change so expertly that he made a great hit with Ethel's father.

"I withdraw my objections," he said. "I'd be proud to have you for a son-in-law."

"I think he's really serious," said Ethel's mother. "After all, it might be very nice to be a countess."

About that time a customer came in. Seeing the future earl behind the counter, he made a facetious remark, which Ethel didn't like. Otway promptly squirted seltzer in his eye and told him that one more remark about his future bride—and he'd be thrown out of the door!

"I love you for that," Ethel remarked, as any girl would.

The whole town turned out for the wedding, as might have been expected. And to-day Ethel is mistress of the huge ancestral castle of the Earls of Louth. Like most modern girls, she proved herself adaptable. Being a countess wasn't so difficult after all. London society accepted her, and liked her for the same sincerity, naturalness and charm that had so attracted her husband.

Aunt Maude, an innocent Cupid

Taxi!

Red hair made her say it, and pride made her go through with her foolish boast

By H. Thompson Rich

IT was a very foolish if not a mad thing to say, but red-haired, freckle-nosed Ann Prentice had been saying more or less foolish if not mad things ever since she could remember.

"My dear Aunt Maude," she said, with a toss of that fiery head, "if you don't stop nagging me to marry Peter Van Tuyl, I—I'll run off with a cab driver!"

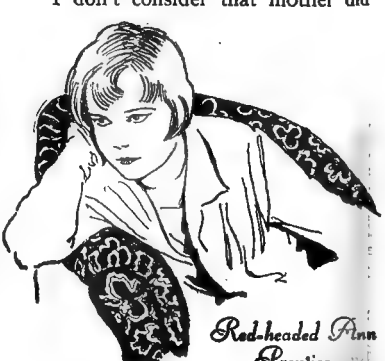
Whereupon the recipient of this rash threat—a poised, contriving woman who before her marriage to the short-lived banker, Henry Endicott, had been Maude Randall, of the Baltimore Randalls—fixed upon her capricious niece a look of pained reproof.

"I believe you are fully capable of it!" she declared. "You are poor Julia all over again. No doubt you will end up by doing something equally unfortunate."

"Poor Julia" had been Ann's mother, and the "unfortunate" thing she had done was marry Grant Prentice, a mining engineer with more prospects than money. The money had vanished, and the prospects had consumed Julia's share of the modest fortune left by old Robert Randall, the Baltimore carriage builder.

Her own share Maude had conserved, and it was this, added to the proceeds of the Henry Endicott estate, that was now maintaining herself and her dead sister's child in the opulence of a New York apartment hotel on upper Park Avenue.

"I don't consider that mother did



Red-headed Ann Prentice

Go gle

anything unfortunate in marrying father!" Ann declared in heated defense. Her intensely blue eyes flashed fire. "If he had lived he might have made millions."

"Nonsense!" said her aunt. "He was an improvident adventurer."

"He was nothing of the sort!" Ann had been over this ground before, and knew where she stood. "He was a pioneer! He helped develop the West, even if he didn't leave any money."

"Develop Jack Robinson!" Maude Randall Endicott had been over this ground, too. "That is pure romantic bosh! The sooner you get such notions out of your head, child, the better off you will be. What you want is a practical-minded—"

"Hard-headed young business man like Peter Van Tuyl—and not so young, either! Well, I'll admit he's practical-minded, and hard-headed—oh, *very*, hard-headed—but as a prospective husband, leaving aside his age, he just isn't the type. So please, Aunt Maude, let's not talk about him any more!"

But Aunt Maude pleased to.

"Peter's family is among the oldest in New York," she reminded her niece. "Why, he goes back to—"

"Father Knickerbocker, I suppose!" Ann was growing more and more impatient. "Well, I wish he'd stayed there!"

What she wanted was some one who went forward—or westward, like her father—or anywhere but backward. She wanted a husband, if she had to have one at all, whom people might look back on some day the way auntie looked back on the Van Tuyls now.

"You are too immature to know your own mind, child. Some day you will appreciate my efforts in getting you a husband like Peter Van Tuyl. So, take the advice of an older woman and accept his proposal while it is still open."

Whereupon Ann rose and flared:

"Oh, *will* you stop talking about that braying donkey! I wouldn't have him if he were the last man on earth. I'd sooner marry a—a cab-driver!"

And without another word she snatched up her hat and purse, raged from that ornate room, rang furiously for an elevator, and descended to the lobby.

WHERE Ann was going, she didn't know. Somewhere—*anywhere!*

Storming out into the autumn street, she stood a moment uncertain, the coolish afternoon sunshine glinting redly in her maple-leaf hair, a faint breeze from the Hudson molding her russet tweed suit about her slight, trim figure—and in that moment a taxicab came careening down the avenue.

It was an awfully smart and shiny taxicab, and it was coming along awfully fast, but that didn't deter Ann from hailing it.

With a *wh-rrsh* of brakes, the lustrous chariot slid up to the curb.

"Taxi, miss?" said the driver, opening the door.

Ann surveyed him appraisingly. He was young, big, tanned. And, yes, he was quite attractive looking, in a cab-driverish sort of way.

Then she surveyed his car—and it was really a most admirable piece of machinery, all in blue and green, with bright gold stripes in all the appropriate places.

So she stepped in.

He shut the door. Then, as the gala cab rolled off, he turned to inquire:

"Where to, miss?"

He had brownish-gray eyes, she

noted. Maybe he was a college football player or something, and was only driving taxis temporarily.

"Where to, miss?" the young man repeated, as his vehicle gathered speed.

Ann thought fast, but no ideas came, till, glancing around, she saw a paper pennant reading "California" stuck on one of the cab windows.

Whereupon, with inspiration, she said:

"California!"

"What?" queried the driver, turning his head.

"You heard me!"

"But I didn't. That is—"

"I said California!" said Ann.

"Oh, you did?" An instant's reflection, then: "Sorry, miss—I don't know that street."

"It isn't a street!" she told him. "It's a State!"

"That's right—I remember studying that in school," he agreed with a grin, one eye on his course. "But leaving aside the joking, miss, where do you want to go?"

"California!" reiterated Ann.

He slowed down and faced her squarely.

"You—really mean that?"

"Of course I mean it!" she declared with a flash of those intensely blue eyes. "I am in the habit of meaning what I say," which wasn't at all the truth. "So drive on, please!"

"All right, miss—California it is!"

And stepping on the gas, he shot his giddy vehicle on down the avenue.

ANN sat back, not too calmly, as the whirling cab sped south.

But, when suddenly they turned and wove through the tangle of down town traffic into the Holland Tunnel, that led under the Hudson to New Jersey, she sat up quite straight.

"Where are you taking me?" she demanded.

"To California," informed the driver, without batting an eye. "That was where you said you wanted to go, wasn't it?"

"Y-yes," said Ann, not very certainly, glancing into her purse.

Thank Heaven, it was comfortably full! That was something, anyway. And her check book was in it, though it wouldn't be needed. For, at Trenton, or Philadelphia at most, this enterprising young man would have to pull up for the night.

There she could pay him, take a train back to New York, and arrive late enough to cause Aunt Maude the anxiety she deserved, though not late enough to be embarrassing.

So Ann sat back again and composed herself, or tried to, as they wound swiftly through the tunnel.

But when they burst from it presently, and started bowling out across the Jersey meadows, she began to have qualms again.

"You're driving awfully fast, aren't you?" she said, wondering if by chance he was trying to kidnap her or something. "There no mad rush, you know."

"Yes, there is!" he flung over his shoulder. "California's a long way off, miss. I'll have to hit it up if we're going to get there this week. It's already Tuesday."

"But I have no desire to get there this week," said Ann. "So please slow down! I—I'm really in no hurry at all."

"Well, *I* am!" said the driver, clamping down his accelerator still farther.

Ann clung to her seat, not a little panicky.

"W-why are you in such a hurry?"

"Because I'm out to set a record," was his prompt reply.

"A—record?" startled. "What sort of record?"

"A road record for the fastest taxi run from New York to Los Angeles! You see, this machine is a Regal. But there's a rival company, the Royal—and they've already set a record of five days flat."

"I—I see."

"But you don't!" swinging them past a ten-ton truck at fifty miles an hour. "For I'm not a cab driver by trade, but an officer in the Regal company and a friend of the president."

So he *was* only driving taxis temporarily!

Ann's spirits soared—to fall like a pricked balloon as he added:

"And if I win I get his daughter—so I'm out to win!"

"O-oh!" she said, in a very small voice, feeling suddenly about the size of a button on the upholstery.

"So you see, miss, I was rather surprised when you said you wanted to go to California."

"But why did you stop for me?"

"Well, I'll admit I shouldn't have, but I thought you probably wanted to go just a few blocks, and I thought I might as well give you a lift. You—well, you looked so mad and impatient, and pretty."

"Thank you!" Ann said, but her voice was cold.

"Why do you want to go to California, anyway, miss?" he asked, eying her through the reflector over his windshield.

"To—to meet my *fiancé!*" she lied, swiftly and with feeling.

But even this didn't seem to subdue him, though it gave him a start.

"Oh, I see. But aren't the trains running?"

"Trains make me sick—and so do you!" this latter to herself.

"But you could have taken a plane and got there quicker."

"Not much quicker at the rate you're going!"

"But safer, perhaps."

Ann regarded the back of his head with rage.

"Do you want me to get out?" she demanded.

The young man debated.

"No, not if you want to stay."

"Then for heaven's sake stop talking and drive on!"

IN almost no time they were in Newark, and in no time and a half they were in Elizabeth. From Elizabeth to Rahway was but a flash, and from Rahway to New Brunswick was but another.

While the sun was yet high, they pulled into Trenton—and there, on the approach to the long bridge over the Delaware, they were held up by an open span.

As they waited for the traffic to move, Ann saw the impertinent young man take a book from behind his seat and promptly absorb himself in it.

She tried to believe she was not the least bit interested in the nature of the volume, and sat back in haughty silence—but the span stayed open an outrageous length of time, while a long string of pokey fuel-barges passed up the river behind a puffing tug, and at length she could restrain herself no longer.

"What are you reading?" she inquired, curious to know what sort of literature would occupy an official of a taxi company.

"The greatest writer in the world!" he replied, handing her the book. "Know who he is?"

She did presently, for the title read: "Romance Around the Corner." And under it: "Selected Stories by O. Henry."

"Do you really believe that?" said Ann, smiling.

"What? That he's the greatest writer in the world? You bet I do!"

"No—I mean about romance being around the corner."

"Yes, I believe that, too—and sometimes in the middle of the block!"

But if he meant anything personal by that, he had no opportunity just then to expand his theme, for at that moment the span swung shut and the traffic began to move.

"Keep it and read it if you get bored," he said, as she started to hand back the book.

So Ann kept it—but she didn't read it, for in the first place she wasn't bored, and in the second place she wouldn't have read it if she had been, and in the third place the car went far too fast to read in the first place.

They filed over the bridge, swung into the Lincoln Highway and swept out across the Pennsylvania countryside like a blue streak—or like a blue and green and gold one, to be literal.

Almost before she knew it they were in a city Ann had never seen before, and quite a large one.

"Where are we?" she asked, peering out puzzledly into the sunset.

"Reading," was the calm reply.

"But Philadelphia?" more anxiously now. "Where is Philadelphia?"

"Oh, that's way behind! We skirted it and came through Norristown. Shall we put up here for the night and continue on at dawn?" with a taunting smile. "Or shall we go on to Harrisburg and start off a little later in the morning?"

Ann calculated swiftly.

"Suppose we go on!" she said, concluding that at Harrisburg she could still get a train back that night, and determined to keep this ambitious young man guessing as long as possible.

So to Harrisburg they went.

IT was dark when they arrived, and he drove her at once to one of the leading hotels.

"Well, good night, miss," he said, as he turned her over to a liveried attendant at the curb. "I'll call for you at seven in the morning. Please be prompt, otherwise I'll have to go on without you."

"That would be sad!" said Ann, smiling, though she could have slain him.

Then, as he tipped his cap and started to engage his gears, she added:

"Wait! I—haven't paid you your fare."

"Don't bother," he replied, with that taunting smile again. "You can settle at the end of the trip."

"Oh, very well," coolly. "Good night, Mr.—"

"Jones—Jimmie Jones. Good night, Miss—"

"Smith—Susie Smith!"

And, with a defiant laugh, Ann turned and entered the hotel.

But she didn't register. Instead, to the amazement of the liveried attendant, she walked right straight through the lobby and made her exit on the next street.

There, hailing another taxi, she ordered herself to be taken to the railroad station. But something happened.

It wasn't an accident. At least, nothing happened to the cab. But something happened to Ann, something quite as devastating to her peace of mind—and suddenly she didn't want

to go to the railroad station. Suddenly she wanted to meet that taunting Jimmie Jones person in the morning and show him she really meant to go on to California!

It was a very foolish if not mad thing to want to do, of course—but red-haired, freckle-nosed Ann Prentice had been wanting to do more or less foolish if not mad things ever since she could remember, and had mostly had to content herself by saying them.

Even so, it is extremely doubtful if she would have done it, but for a certain remark this Jimmie Jones had made.

"Please be prompt," he had said, "otherwise I'll have to go on without you."

That was really what caused her to do it. He'd have to go on without her, would he? Well, just let him try! And beat the record — and get the president's daughter? Maybe!

So Ann leaned forward and spoke to the driver.

"I've changed my mind," she said. "I'm not going to the railroad station. Take me to the nearest telegraph office instead."

And when he had taken her there, she told him to wait while she went in and sent a message.

The message was to Aunt Maude, informing her that she had made good her word and run off with a cab driver. They were on their way to California in his vehicle, she said, and she would advise further by letter. To this she added—which was really a waste of money—the admonition not to worry.

Then, having started this piece of news winging eastward, Ann returned to the taxi and set forth on a night shopping tour of Harrisburg.

The result was that when she appeared once more at the hotel Jimmie had selected for her, it was with a loaded bag which the liveried attendant bore wonderingly to the desk for her.

There she registered with a flourish as "Susie Smith — New York," and was shown to a room.

NEXT morning at seven sharp, wondering if her knight of the dizzy chariot would really be there, Ann stepped out to the curb, followed by the still mystified attendant—and there he was!

One glance told her that he was at least as surprised as she was, probably more. A second told her that he was newly shaved, freshly collared — and yes, that he was even nicer looking than he had seemed the day before.

"Good morning, Miss Smith!" he said cheerily. "Did you sleep well?"

"Perfectly!" she assured him, which was to say the least an exaggeration, since she'd scarcely slept a wink. "And you, Mr. Jones?"

"Never better!" he replied, which was probably no exaggeration at all, since he certainly looked refreshed and fit. "So suppose we get off? We've got to make St. Louis by to-night."

He held open the door, while the attendant put Ann and her bag inside, then shut it and they started off—shot out over the Susquehanna and on across Pennsylvania like a comet on wheels.

But they didn't make St. Louis that night, for right after Columbus, Ohio, where they stopped for lunch, Jimmie began having trouble with the engine.

"Maybe these Regal taxis aren't as good as they look!" said Ann sweetly. "If it acts this way already, what 'll we do when we get to the Rocky Mountains?"

"Don't worry!" said Jimmie, not so

sweetly. "I'll get it fixed to-night. The valves are probably sticking."

Anyway, whatever it was, the farthest they got that night was Terre Haute, Indiana. There "Susie Smith" registered again at a leading hotel, while Jimmie Jones went off to placate his stubborn steed.

Sure enough, there he was. A glance told her he was as surprised as she was

"And I hope he doesn't drain the gasoline tank!" Ann told herself with a smile.

For when they came out from lunch in Columbus that noon, she had managed to squeeze a little rich Ohio water from her hankie into it! Not much, but just enough to annoy the most even-tempered and orderly engine.

Jimmie evidently *did* drain the gasoline tank, however, after finding that his labor on the valves was fruitless, for next morning the engine worked perfectly, and they zoomed down through Illinois and Missouri as though on wings, arriving in Joplin in time for lunch.

But in the afternoon, afflictions again beset the flying taxi—this time an epidemic of flat tires—and no sooner had this trying malady worn off than trouble began developing in the carburetor. They got no farther than Oklahoma City that night, which was Thursday.

"Well, better luck to-morrow!" smiled Ann, as she took her leave of him.

"I'll need it!" growled Jimmie. "We're already behind schedule. Personally, I think you're a hoodoo!"

"Maybe I am." Her blue eyes lifted contritely. "Do you want to leave me and go on alone?"

"I can stand it if you can!" he said.

SO again, while Ann slept, Jimmie labored with his renegade engine.

With the result that Friday noon found them, after a mad dash

across the Panhandle of Texas, eating lunch in the little New Mexico border town of Nara Visa.

While they were at a service station a half hour later, Jimmie handed her a newspaper. "Maybe you'll find something in this to interest you."

Ann's heart gave a flip. Did he suspect?

"T-thanks!" she replied.

But her heart gave more of a flip, presently—for right on page one was a most dismaying item. It was set off in a box, and read:

ROMANCE IN A TAXI

Page Cupid!—$1000 Reward!

Mean-minded sheriffs, and others—take notice! Fortune awaits the captor of a New York taxicab reported heading across country with a driver—name unknown—and two passengers, one of them Dan Cupid!

The other passenger is Ann Prentice, described as red-headed and attractive.

The reward is offered by her aunt, Mrs. Maude Randall Endicott, eastern society woman, who requests that she be held and the New York police department notified.

When Ann read that item her impulse was instant flight.

How dare Aunt Maude do such a thing! Oh, the publicity! She'd never be able to face her friends again.

She glanced covertly at Jimmie, who stood by the gas pump. Evidently he hadn't seen the item, for he appeared quite calm and unconcerned. And evidently the man at the pump handle hadn't either, otherwise he wouldn't be standing there working for wages with a one-thousand-dollar reward within his grasp.

At the first opportunity, Ann dropped that awful sheet out of the window.

"We ought to make Arizona by night, hadn't we?" she inquired innocently. "That is, if you don't go through too many towns."

For towns were apt to be dangerously full of mean-minded sheriffs and other unromantic people!

"Yes, we ought to," he replied.

But though they went through scarcely any towns at all, perhaps because there were scarcely any to go through, they didn't seem able to make much progress, for the car continued to develop engine trouble and boiled up through the mountains like a wheezy old teakettle.

As they puffed along, Ann began to have increasing qualms of conscience. She had spoiled his chances, tinkering with the car, and now he would never beat the record — and win the president's daughter.

But Ann wasn't glad any more, somehow.

It had been different before. But that hateful item had set her thinking, wondering. Had they really taken on another passenger, somewhere along that whirling, dusty trail? Dan Cupid! Was he really riding with them? And Jimmie's heart already lost to another!

It made her feel very small and false, and she would have given anything to repair the damage she had done.

Despite Jimmie's best efforts, the farthest they could get that night was Albuquerque, however it was pronounced.

NEXT morning, however—which was Saturday—Jimmie declared he had located the trouble. It was the timing-gears, he said.

Ann hoped it really was, for he looked tired, and had evidently spent half the night working.

On across New Mexico and down into Arizona they sped. As they crossed the border their gala chariot set wheels on the last State that lay between them and their goal.

Along toward noon, at the torrid little oasis of Oro Vista, in the midst of the great Arizona desert, a lean, leathery sheriff stepped out and halted them.

"Jest a minute, thar!" he drawled, drenching the dry street with tobacco juice. "'Pears to me you folks is a bit fur from home!"

"We are, somewhat," conceded Jimmie, while Ann shrank miserably in her seat. "Why?"

"Because I jest thought maybe you was!" shifting his quid and winking slyly. "Who's the gal you got thar? Ain't her name Ann Prentus?"

"No, it ain't—isn't," said Jimmie. "It's Susie Smith. Kindly step aside. We're neither bandits nor bootleggers, and are in a hurry to get on."

"Wa-al, ease yoreself, partner," said the sheriff, "for you ain't goin' no futher right now!"

"But what do you want us for?" Ann heard Jimmie ask.

"I reckon you know, young feller," was the sage reply. "But jest to freshen yore memory, take a squint at this!"

Whereupon, with sinking heart, she saw him draw from his shirt pocket a messy clipping.

Jimmie glanced at it, then turned to Ann.

"Is that true?" he demanded.

For a long moment, as she sat holding that damning little piece of paper, Ann was silent. Then at length, without looking up, she said:

"Yes—it's true."

"Wa-al, I reckon that settles it!" stated the sheriff before Jimmie could say anything. "So jest drive along slow, mister," stepping on the running-board. "I'll show you the way!"

The way led to the seat of Oro Vista law and order, and thence to a sad row of cells in the basement.

On a cot in here, Ann collapsed forlornly.

AN hour later Jimmie appeared outside her cell a free man.

"Hello, Miss Smith—Miss Prentice, I mean!" he called cheerily. "What's the good word?"

She didn't answer.

"Susie — I mean Ann!" he called. "What are you doing—crying?"

"Oh, go away!" she sobbed. "What a hateful little fake you must think me!"

"Nothing of the sort," he asserted stoutly. "I suspected something like this all along, and I knew it when I saw that paper in Nara Visa. Come here! I want to talk to you."

Obediently she came.

"H-how did you get out?" Lifting to him her penitent and clouded blue eyes.

"Bribed my jailor!" he smiled.

"But if you knew it, why—?"

"Never mind about that! What *I* want to know, Ann Prentice, is what your *fiancé* will think when he hears of this?"

Whereupon Ann steeled herself and said:

"I—I have no *fiancé*, Jimmie! And oh, you'll hate me when you know the truth. You see, I—"

And she told him the truth, all of it, even to tinkering with the car, ending:

"So you see, Jimmie, it's all my fault you didn't beat the record."

But he didn't seem so terribly aggrieved.

"Not *all* your fault, Ann!" he said,

coming close and taking her hand through the bars. "I've a confession to make, too. I did a little tinkering myself! That's what held us back toward the last."

"B-but why, Jimmie?" dazedly. "Why did you deliberately throw away your chance for the record, when—?"

"There wasn't any record! No taxi's ever done such a damn fool thing before, and probably never will again."

"But the president's daughter?" all at sea now.

"There wasn't any!"

"And you aren't an officer of the company?"

"No—just a young man trying to get ahead in the world! The only company I'm an officer of is the One-Man Taxi Company, unincorporated."

"But you told me—oh, *why* did you tell me such a silly story?"

"Because I thought you were kidding me about wanting to go to California to meet your *fiancé*, and I thought I'd go you one better."

"But that California sticker on the car? What was *that* doing there?"

"Why, that's easily explained," he told her. "I had a couple of Los Angeles real estate men for fares Tuesday afternoon. They were in New York for a convention or something. Anyway, you know what boosters they are. They stuck it there, and I hadn't had time to take it off—and I'm glad I didn't!"

"Why?" Ann dared to ask.

"Because, you crazy little redhead," he dared to answer, "I love you!"

ANN had never been spoken to quite that way before, but she rather liked it.

"Say that again, if you dare!" she said.

"I really have no right to," he told her.

"Well, say it anyway!"

So he did—and she liked it even better this time.

"It was love at first sight," he went on, taking her other hand, too, and holding them both quite firmly. "O. Henry was right. Romance is waiting around every corner—and sometimes in the middle of the block! The moment I saw you standing there that afternoon, looking so mad and pretty, I knew I'd found it. Tell me, Ann darling, do you love me, too?"

"I—think I do, Jimmie dear."

"Don't you *know?*" drawing her close.

"Y-yes, Jimmie—I know!"

Whereupon he pressed her wistful little face against the bars and kissed her.

Freeing herself at last, Ann smiled:

"Do you love me a thousand dollars' worth, Jimmie dear?"

"A million!" he assured her. "Why?"

"Because, if some one would give that mean old sheriff a thousand dollars, I think he'd let me go—and personally, I haven't it."

"Neither have I," said Jimmie. "Everything I own is invested in the car."

"Well, in that case," with a tilt of her freckled nose, "I guess I'll have to wait for Aunt Maude—and when she arrives, Peter will probably be with her."

"Who's Peter?" jealously.

"A practical-minded, hard-headed young New York business man auntie wants me to marry—and it's really fearfully difficult to argue with her. She almost always gets her way in the end, unless you run off somewhere—and I can't very well run off anywhere,

Jimmie dear, if you're too poor to bail me out. So I guess we'll have to forget what we were talking about a minute ago."

"The devil we will!" said Jimmie.

"Jimmie!" said Ann.

"Sorry, but I'm excited. I always get excited when I get an idea—and I think I've got one! What we need for this romance is an O. Henry ending. You aren't going to marry that dodo Peter if I can help it, and I think I can. Could you stand a little more publicity, darling, for the sake of getting out?"

"A little more! Good heavens, *could* any one have more?"

"Much more! It's only a hunch, but I think it might be worth something to the Regal people to use our names in their advertising, in connection with this thing."

"You mean about getting in jail?" with a frown.

"No, about crossing the continent in one of their taxis. So what do you say I get the president of the company on the long-distance phone and proposition him?"

Ann reflected.

"Do you think it might be worth a thousand dollars?"

"I think it might be worth considerably more!"

"Then I think I can stand it if you can—so go ahead, Jimmie dear."

Whereupon he departed.

A HALF hour later, Jimmie Jones returned, wearing a grin of triumph on his face. The lean, mean sheriff was with him.

"Well, I win!" was his greeting as that tamed lion of Oro Vista law and order unlocked the door of Ann's cell. "The president thought my idea was a wow."

"Oh, Jimmie!" rushing into his arms.

"So I told him to wire two thousand and apply the balance to the purchase of additional cabs—for now that I'm going to have a wife to support, I'll need a whole fleet of them!"

"But, Jimmie dear," lifting those blue eyes hopefully, "what's the extra thousand for?"

"Our honeymoon, gingerbread! Where would you like to go?"

"California!" declared Ann.

Waiting at the Church

Out of love came bitterness, and out of bitterness a great resolve

By Adelaide Humphries

HER wedding day! This was Kathy's first thought upon awakening. Her next was that the sun was shining, just as it should be on one's wedding day. And then that if she lay there another minute she would *never* be ready by four o'clock.

But she was—four o'clock found Kathy radiantly lovely in white satin and sheer lacy veil, with the rest of the bridal party, Alma in pale green, Helene in pink, Lucy in yellow, Baby Jane in fluffy ruffles of blue—a veritable flower garden in the little reception room in the back of the church.

"Aren't you frightened nearly to death?" Alma asked. "It must be time for the music to begin. My knees are shaking so I'll never get down that long aisle."

"I'm not frightened the least bit," Kathy smiled serenely. "Yes, I imagine it's time now." Oh, it was going to be the most perfect, the most beautiful wedding! Everything just as she had planned.

"Well, I bet Nathan's scared," Al-

ma replied. "They say the groom always is."

"Maybe he won't show up," Helene suggested laughingly. "He may have decided to beat it while he could. Wouldn't that be dreadful, girls?"

"He's said all along that he might get cold feet at the last minute," Kathy smiled, remembering that was one of Nathan's pet jokes to tease her.

"If he could see you, he'd know what a lucky man he is!" Alma declared warmly. "Isn't she a regular June picture bride, girls? Oh, there comes your mother, Kathy. . . . She'll know how much longer we have to wait."

"How come you're not out front where you belong?" Kathy greeted her mother affectionately. "The girls are almost nervous wrecks. Isn't it time for the wedding march?"

"Yes...about..." Mrs. Conners avoided Kathy's eyes. "But it seems, dear—now don't become alarmed!—it seems that Nathan is delayed."

"I'm not alarmed," Kathy returned confidently, then laughed. "This *is* a joke, after what we were just saying, girls. But I always knew Nathan would be late for our wedding. He's such an irresponsible dear. Is it very late, mumsie?"

"A little," Mrs. Conners admitted, not daring to say how late it was. "I sent Edgar and Mr. Peters to make inquiries. They should be back now; but I thought I'd come tell you not to get worried." She gave Kathy's cheek a swift kiss and pressed her hand. "I'll go find out if there's any news."

"You don't suppose he could have met with an accident?" Kathy's blue eyes clouded over for a moment.

"No mere accident would keep an anxious bridegroom from getting to the church," Alma assured her. "Probably lost his collar button—they say a man never owns but one — but don't worry, he'll get here."

"Waiting at the church," Helene giggled. "Isn't that the title of an old song?"

"We won't have to wait long," Kathy said; she wasn't going to worry that Nathan had had an accident as she knew he was an expert driver.

But it seemed a long time before Mrs. Conners returned, and then she said that they had not been able to find out anything definite. "It seems Nathan left this morning...."

"This morning!" Kathy cried.

Mrs. Conners bit her lip. She had not meant to say that; but it was so difficult to know just what to say. "We've phoned all the hospitals," she hurried on. "If he had had an accident we'd surely have heard. But don't you think, dear, that perhaps we'd better make some sort of announcement? The guests are becoming restless. What I mean is—well—it hardly seems probable that Nathan will come now...."

"By all means," Kathy interrupted, "simply tell them the facts. That Nathan has been unavoidably delayed—the wedding is postponed—we'll have to put it off until to-morrow." She turned to her bridesmaids, as coolly serene as though nothing had happened. "Sorry, girls. You'll all be here to-morrow?"

"We will—if Nathan will," Helene murmured under her breath.

Alma glowered at her. But if Kathy heard, she gave no sign.

"Put your head on my shoulder and cry if you want to," Alma said afterward, when they were in the limousine—the limousine that was to have taken Kathy and Nathan off for their honeymoon.

"That wouldn't do any good," Kathy answered. "I shan't cry. I shall go home, change my clothes, and start out to find what has happened to Nathan. Oh, Alma, you don't suppose he could have been..." But she could not say the thought that had come to her.

"Certainly not!" Alma declared emphatically. "If anything like *that* had happened, you'd have heard. Kathy dear, I wish you *would* cry!"

Which was what Mrs. Conners kept wishing during the weeks that followed. If only Kathy would cry to relieve her suffering. Her mother could not bear to see her strained, white face, her silent, set lips.

BUT Kathy couldn't cry. She wished, wicked as such a wish was, that Nathan had been hurt — even killed — on that glorious June day that was to have been her wedding day—and that had not been hers, but had been his.

For Nathan had left town early that morning and married another girl while Kathy waited at the church.

At first Kathy had refused to believe it. She thought they were joking, or keeping the truth from her. Then gossip and rumor turned to facts. Nathan and his bride returned to live in the little town.

"My dear, you simply cannot go on this way," her mother said finally in desperation. "I know how much you've suffered. But you must pull yourself together. Nathan isn't worth it. You must be glad that you found that out in time."

"Glad! For all the misery—for being made a laughing stock of by the whole town — for being jilted — discarded — flung aside!" Kathy's blue eyes flashed fire.

"It's not that bad," her mother protested. "You mustn't let this make you bitter, my dear."

Kathy gave a scornful laugh. "How can I help feeling bitter? Not just because of what people are saying—the disgrace—but to find out that the person you believed in—trusted—for three long years — wasn't the person you thought him at all. To find that all men..."

"But all men aren't like Nathan!" her mother cried. "That's what I'm telling you, dear. You're young. You'll fall in love again—marry..."

"Never!" Kathy's blue eyes were deep pools of defiance and despair. "I'll never believe — never trust another man as long as I live. There's only one reason I'd ever *speak* to one—to make him suffer as Nathan made me! It's a sort of vow I've made to myself—if I ever meet another man—ever think I'm beginning to trust or believe in him the least bit—I'll do to him what Nathan did to me."

"Kathy, Kathy!" Her mother shook her head sadly. "That will only bring you more heartache and misery. For my sake, dear, won't you try to change? Try to forget. Won't you do what I suggest—take a little trip—go away..."

"People would say I was running away!"

"Not now—you've faced your trouble long enough. Now why not take a trip to Europe, dear? You've always wanted to go.... To please me.... Wouldn't that help, dear?"

Kathy finally agreed to go—but not because she thought it would help. How could it, when she and Nathan had talked and planned that some day they would go together and now she was going alone.

A honeymoon alone, Kathy thought

bitterly, after she had packed all her lovely trousseau—all except one white satin gown and sheer lace veil which she buried deep into an old trunk, never to be seen again. After she had boarded the boat—was on her way to Europe... "A honeymoon alone!" she muttered half aloud again.

"Beg pardon—did you speak to me?"

Kathy glanced up, startled. Evidently she was not as alone as she had thought. A young man with grave brown eyes and a serious frown and a mop of thick dark hair—now that he'd removed his hat—sat in the deck chair next to hers. A most presentable young man. His frown changed to a friendly look—and Kathy remembered that he was a man.

"I certainly did not!" she snapped.

The young man colored up to the roots of his hair, mumbled an "Excuse it—me—please," and buried himself again in his book.

Perhaps she need not have been quite so rude. After all, no doubt she had said something aloud, and as there was no one else in sight, owing to the rough sea, the young man could be excused for thinking she had spoken to him.

Nevertheless Kathy took herself—and her thoughts—to the seclusion of her stateroom, which wasn't so very secluded, as she shared it with a bright-eyed, question-marked young school-teacher, who was neither bright-eyed nor able to ask questions now that the sea had upset her equilibrium and digestion.

Kathy's digestion remained the same. She was able to go down to dinner. Apparently very few persons were. There was no one else at Kathy's table, so the captain sent word he would be pleased to have her join him. Kathy accepted with pleasure, until she found that the young man with grave brown eyes and serious frown was seated opposite her. Evidently the sea had not affected his appetite. Kathy wished it had.

But in spite of him she managed to enjoy her dinner. The captain was so jolly and entertaining, the rest of the guests proved friendly and interesting, and the young man only annoyed her twice. Once to ask for the salt, which Kathy handed him without a word; again to remark that it was too bad so many passengers were ill — to which Kathy gave the curt reply that to *her* mind, not enough of them were.

AFTER dinner some one suggested bridge, and Kathy was persuaded to make a hand before she realized that the young man was going to make another. She tried to think up an excuse to decline to play, then decided not to let the young man—or *any* man — interfere with what she'd chosen to do. Naturally she had to talk to the young man, since she was unlucky enough to draw him as a partner, but she confined her remarks strictly to the game. Really, he seemed harmless enough; a quiet, serious person, but Kathy wasn't taking any chances. He was a young man, which was enough.

"Let's go up to the ballroom and dance," Mrs. Loomis, at Kathy's table, suggested after they had wearied of bridge. She linked her arm through Kathy's, so that there was nothing to do but go along. Besides, there was nothing else to do, anyway, unless she wanted to endure the school-teacher's proximity in her cabin or brave the wind alone on deck.

Some one claimed Mrs. Loomis for a dance, which left Kathy standing

alone for a moment. But only a moment, as the young man — his name was Bowling — or Bowlinger, Kathy hadn't bothered to remember which— stepped up to suggest that they dance, too.

Of course Kathy meant to refuse. But perhaps it was the swing of the music, or the feeling of loneliness that crept over her at sight of the happy, dancing couples; whatever it was, before she knew it she had murmured a vague consent and fallen into rhythm.

The young man proved an excellent dancer. The music was fine. The floor not too crowded. Kathy was surprised to find how much she had enjoyed herself when they stopped at the end of three encores. In fact, she was almost ashamed to think she'd enjoyed herself so much with a young man, so that when he asked her to dance again, she refused flatly and sought a corner by herself.

But it wasn't much fun to watch other people dancing when you so enjoyed dancing yourself — and the young man didn't seek her out again, but seemed to find plenty of other partners, so that Kathy decided to go up on deck.

It was difficult walking against the high wind, so Kathy sought her chair, tucked the rug around her legs, leaned back and closed her eyes. She tried not to hear the faint strains of dance music, lilting and gay—tried to forget how lonely and miserable and left-out she felt... but it was no use—going to Europe wasn't going to help, even though darling mumsie had insisted it would. How could she forget? How could she shut out the memories—the emptiness—the loneliness?

"I wish I were dead!" Kathy groaned, clenching her hands.

"Oh, surely not!" a voice protested so close that Kathy almost jumped overboard and got her wish. The voice belonged to the young man; he was sitting in his chair.

"Did I frighten you? Sorry! But you seem to have a habit of talking out loud. Only you shouldn't say such terrible things! Why should you—the prettiest girl on board—the best dancer, too! — why should you wish you were dead? Please! Don't run away. I won't bite. I won't even talk, if you'll stay."

Kathy hesitated — after all, she couldn't keep running away the rest of her life—she sank back into her chair.

"That's fine!" the young man said; he leaned over and tucked the steamer rug around Kathy much more capably than she had been able to tuck it around herself.

There was a long, long silence. The waves beat against the sides of the huge boat, the crisp air fanned their faces, the gay music drifted up. Kathy did not feel quite so alone.

"Well, why don't you say something?" she asked.

"I thought I promised not to!" the young man chuckled. "But I'd like to—if I may. If you won't run away. We've been properly introduced. I can furnish the best of references. I'd like to get acquainted—be friends..."

"Friends?" Kathy's tone was cool. "How could we become friends in five more days? Even if you *can* give references," she almost giggled, "sounds as though you wanted to hire out as chauffeur."

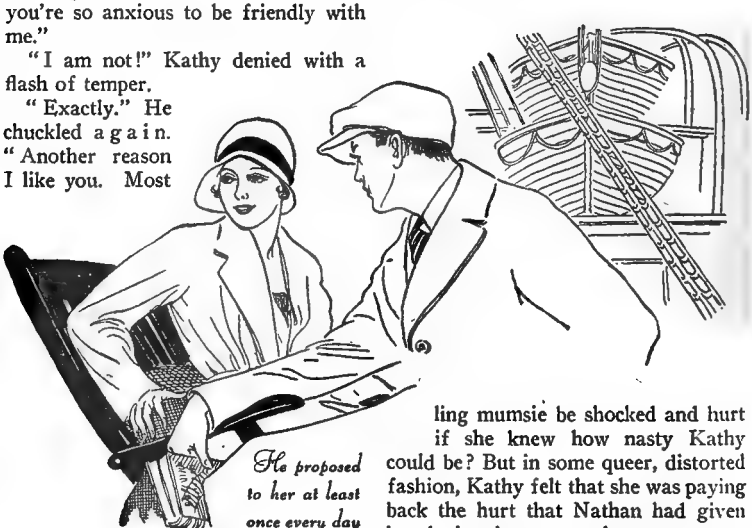
"I'll hire out—to you—as anything you say. But," more seriously, "you'd be surprised how friendly I could become in five short days with some one I'm anxious to be friendly with."

Kathy made a sound between a grunt and a snort.

"Don't sound so unbelieving!" the young man protested. "I'm not handing you a line. I'm a serious person. Even this trip is serious for me. Business—a big deal I'm trying to put across. This other is serious, too—my wanting to be friends. You see, you're so anxious to be friendly with me."

"I am not!" Kathy denied with a flash of temper.

"Exactly." He chuckled again. "Another reason I like you. Most girls—I'm sorry if this sounds caddish—but most girls don't run away from a man. I told you I'm a serious person—like to tackle serious things. Looks to me as though getting you to like a fellow would be a job worth while!"



He proposed to her at least once every day

"I don't *like* men," Kathy said shortly. "I hate them. First you suggested being friends, now you're talking about liking a person..." She got up from her chair. "I'm sorry, Mr. Bowling, but I'm afraid we can't even be friends. Good night. I'm going in."

"Bowlinger," he corrected. "I *am* flattered. You don't even remember my name! But I'm not discouraged. Remember what I said about tackling difficult problems. I've got five whole days."

But Kathy had gone on, not bothering to reply. She knew she was being rude, downright nasty. Wouldn't darling mumsie be shocked and hurt if she knew how nasty Kathy could be? But in some queer, distorted fashion, Kathy felt that she was paying back the hurt that Nathan had given her, by hurting every other young man. Just as she had told her mother—she would like to treat some man the way Nathan had treated her.

Well—why not? Mr. Bowlinger was a man. Any man would do. One was as good—or rather as bad—as another. Mr. Bowlinger had started it—had asked for it. Let him carry matters—friendship—liking—as far as he pleased—he would learn then that a girl could be as untrue as a man.

IT was remarkable how their friendship developed in five short days. Everybody on shipboard noticed it. Evidently when young Jimmy Bowlinger tackled a serious problem in his

serious way he made a success of it. He and Kathy were together every minute from the time they left their cabins in the early morning until they returned to them, usually in the early morning hours again.

It was early morning of the last night on board. Kathy and Jimmy—oh, yes, indeed—they had been Kathy and Jimmy to each other since the second day—had danced every dance of the captain's farewell party, and had come up on deck for a breath of air before saying good night.

The sea was no longer rough, it looked like a smooth mirror with streams of light rippling over its polished surface. Little stars twinkled overhead in friendly fashion. Everything was peaceful and quiet. Kathy and Jimmy, leaning against the rail, might have been alone in the world.

"Gosh!" Jimmy breathed with a sort of reverence. "It's great, isn't it? Yet it's sad, too. It kind of grips a fellow—makes him feel small and insignificant—that endless sea—the vast dark skies—small and lonely as the deuce. That is, it would be lonely, Kathleen, if you weren't here. Do you know, I'm going to miss you—terribly."

"You do say such sweet things, Jimmy," Kathy returned lightly. "Sometimes you *almost* fool me into believing you! But, of course, I don't. Why should you miss me?"

"Why shouldn't I?" Jimmy's brown eyes were hurt and indignant. He reached for Kathy's hands and held them firmly in his. "Don't you know, Kathleen—sweet—that I'm in love with you?...Don't pull away! Don't you know that I have been from the moment I laid eyes on you—when you nearly snapped my head off for speaking to you on deck?"

"Mercy!" Kathy mocked, but there was a tremulous note in her mockery. "How could you possibly fall in love with me in five short days—or at first sight? You have to know a person for years to learn to love them, and then," her voice grew bitter, "you never can be sure. After to-night you'll never see me again—you'll forget all about me—make love to the next girl that comes along."

Jimmy dropped her hands rather abruptly. "You think that? Well, you don't know me, Kathleen. I've never been in love with any girl before. I'll never be in love again—with any girl but you. Perhaps I shouldn't have told you so soon. I should have waited. You're mistaken if you think you're never going to see me again. First I told you we were going to be friends—now I'm telling you that we're going to be much more than that. Some day, Kathleen—sweet—you're going to be my wife!"

"Mercy!" Kathy exclaimed again. "Is that a proposal of marriage, Mr. Jimmy Bowlinger?"

"It is," Jimmy asserted solemnly. "The first one. I don't expect you to accept it. But I mean to keep on making them until you do."

"To-morrow," Kathy said, "we land at Liverpool. After that I'll be dashing about to every cathedral and art gallery and country on the map. And after that..."

"You sail for the good old U. S. A. via the Canadian Pacific line, and I"—Jimmy's voice was triumphant—"have arranged passage back on the same boat. That will give me eight whole days. Look what I've accomplished in five! At the end of those eight days—well, wait and see!"

Of course, Kathy told herself, she didn't believe him. Not for one mo-

ment was she going to take him seriously, even though he was such a serious person. No, Kathy was not fooled again, she did not believe in, or trust, young Jimmy Bowlinger. Nevertheless, it was surprising how much she thought about him, wondering if he *had* met some other girl and was making love to her—certainly he had!—wondering if he really would be on the boat sailing back—but, of course, he wouldn't. Besides, she didn't care in the least whether he was or not.

CONSIDERING which, it was also surprising what a flip-flap Kathy's unbelieving heart took when the first person she saw, as she boarded her boat, was young Jimmy Bowlinger, wearing the same serious frown.

She did not know whether she was sorry or glad — of course she didn't really care one way or the other! She told herself grimly, determinedly, that since Jimmy Bowlinger had put himself in a position to receive what was coming to him — well, let him make love to her, propose to her, arrange to meet her at a church. She'd leave him waiting — humiliated, hurt, disillusioned—as Nathan had done to her.

Not that she had anything in particular against Jimmy. She even felt a little bit sorry for him when, as he had warned her—he kept on proposing. But then, she shouldn't, for, of course, he was like Nathan—like every other man.

"All right," Kathy said, after Jimmy had proposed again for the eighth time—once each night—to-night being the last night and the last proposal. "All right, I'll give in!"

"You mean—you really mean"—Jimmy's brown eyes were more gravely serious than ever—"that you'll marry me to-morrow in Montreal—meet me at the church at four o'clock—you really mean it, Kathleen—sweet?"

"Y-es, I mean it," Kathy said, meaning that she meant to carry out her plan. She was prepared now, no matter what, to do to Jimmy what Nathan had done to her. But she wasn't prepared for what Jimmy did to her as soon as she'd said that.

He put his arms around her; firm, strong arms that held her so securely there was no use in trying to struggle away—he bent his head—he kissed her — tenderly, reverently, sweetly—then fiercely, possessively, wonderfully.

"Oh!" Kathy gasped in a tiny thin voice. In three long years Nathan had never kissed her like that. She felt weak and shaken and beaten. She felt angry and thrilled and glad. She felt—well, Kathy was filled with such a queer jumble of feelings that she didn't know how she felt.

"Sweet," Jimmy murmured, and he kissed her again before he let her go; just a little tender kiss, "did I frighten you? It's because I love you so much. And now, good night—I can let you go because I know that soon I'll never have to let you go again."

Kathy went. She found her cabin, she managed to undress, she slipped into her bunk. But Kathy didn't sleep for hours and hours. She lay wide-eyed, her heart thumping loudly, staring into the dark. Thinking. But not of Nathan.

When she woke the sun was shining brightly—just as the sun should shine on one's wedding day. At four o'clock Kathy was supposed to meet Jimmy at the church in Montreal. Jimmy would be there—Jimmy would wait. But Kathy would be on the train, homeward bound.

It was surprising, considering how well her plan carried through, that Kathy should be crying softly to herself as her train bumped along, carrying her away from Montreal, away from the church where she should have met Jimmy—away from Jimmy himself. Why, she should have been happy! Hadn't she carried out the vow she'd made to herself? Hadn't she taken her revenge against men? Hadn't she, in her own fashion, paid back?

Certainly she had. Yet, evidently it hadn't brought her happiness. She couldn't feel very happy, thinking about all the happy days that were past. Happy days! Why, yes, she had been happy! It had been fun, playing with Jimmy. It had been exciting, having him say such flattering things—it had been wonderful, that good night kiss. And now she would never play with him again, never listen to the lovely things he said, never again experience such a kiss...

But didn't she have sense enough to know that he hadn't meant it — the things he'd said—not even the kiss? Of course she had, she told herself severely—and cried some more—and didn't feel happy the least bit.

IT seemed strange to be back in the little home town after having seen so many strange towns and countries and sights. But stranger than this was the fact that the first person Kathy saw as she got off the train was Nathan.

"Why, hello—if it isn't Kathy!" Nathan cried. "No, I'm not a ghost—don't stare at me so! Aren't you going to say hello?"

Exactly like Nathan—nothing serious, ever, about him. One would think nothing had happened between them—that they had laughed and talked together the day before. There was nothing for Kathy to do but act the same way.

"Hand over your bag," Nathan said, helping himself to it; "want a taxi? I'll get you one. Hear you've been seeing the world. Have a hot time?"

"I had a lovely time," Kathy said—as indeed, she realized now, she had. "Yes, I want a taxi. I'm anxious to get home." How different he was from Jimmy—Jimmy so courteous, so serious, so kind!

"There's no big rush, is there?" Nathan asked. "Want to chat with you—a lot on my mind. Gee, you must think I'm an awful sap...you must think..."

"I don't think about you at all." Kathy looked him straight in the eye, and as she said it, she realized that it was true. She didn't think he was a sap—or wasn't. She just didn't care. Why, she hadn't thought about him for ages—not for months, weeks, days — most certainly not during the last eight days, she hadn't thought about Nathan once.

"Then you've forgiven me?" Nathan asked lightly. "Big hearted girl!"

"Forgiven you? Oh, I suppose so—if it means anything to you to hear me say it." She supposed she had forgiven him, now that it didn't matter—that *he* didn't matter in the least.

"I'm sorry, honestly I am," Nathan was saying in his offhand, gay way. "I surely made a mess of things. But that's all over now."

"Yes, it's all over," Kathy said. Oh, wasn't she glad that this was so!

"Yep! That's why I'm down here at the station at this ungodly daylight hour. Put friend wifie on the train. She's gone home to mamma. Never coming back. Gee, it's great to be free.

And now that I am free—or will be before very long—I'll be coming around ringing your front doorbell, take you out stepping, show you a hot time. I may even be willing to take the matrimonial plunge a second time!"

Kathy looked at him—she sort of stared and blinked her eyes. Had she ever really seen him before? Had she ever really known him? Had she believed him capable of talking in such a way? She knew she should feel indignant, insulted, angry — should tell him what a small, contemptible creature he was. But why should she take him seriously? Nathan serious? She threw back her head and laughed. She laughed so long and so hard that Nathan wanted to know, rather peevishly, what she was laughing about.

"Why, I...I'm laughing at y-you—at what you said!" Kathy gasped.

"At me! Well, I like that!" Nathan's face grew so red and sullen looking that he wasn't handsome at all.

"I'm laughing at myself, too," Kathy added, as indeed she was—laughing to think that Nathan, a man like Nathan, had been the cause of so much misery and heartache. Oh, what a little idiot she had been! Oh, what a lucky, lucky escape!

Kathy felt that she had to escape again. "There's a taxi. Here, man! Give me my bag, Nathan." She grabbed it from him, got into the car, slammed the door and, laughter still curling about her lips, shining from her eyes, waved good-by. "Good-by, Nathan. *Good-by!*" The taxi sped out of sight.

BUT Kathy's laughter was short lived. She had rid herself of Nathan. Rid herself of all regret of him, all memory, all thought. But Jimmy—she had lost him!

For Kathy knew, now, as certainly as she knew that she no longer loved Nathan—never had loved him—that she loved Jimmy, that she always would love him. Dear, serious, grave Jimmy. Her tears had been for him—all the tears to come, all the loneliness, the memories, the heartache. For, of course, she'd never see him again.

Yet when Kathy reached home, ran into the little house, hugged and kissed her mother, who should she see standing in the doorway but Jimmy himself!

But of course it wasn't—it couldn't be—the world was upside down. Kathy rubbed her eyes and looked helplessly at her mother; looked unbelievingly at Jimmy, for it *was* Jimmy standing there!

"Kathleen, sweet, can you ever, ever forgive me?" It was even Jimmy's voice.

"Ever forgive you?" Kathy murmured, wondering if she had lost her sight, hearing, or mind.

"Kathy doesn't understand how you could be here—it's such a surprise," her mother's eyes danced.

"That's easily explained," Jimmy said. "I flew over—had to find the quickest way. I've explained everything else to your mother. But now I must explain to you, dear—if I may."

"You flew over?" Kathy repeated—yes, that explained how he got here as quickly, quicker than she had; but it didn't explain anything else. Why he should want to fly after her—why he should ask her to forgive him after the unforgivable way she had treated him?

"You see," Jimmy was explaining, "it was because of that business deal I told you about—the one I went to London to try to close. Well, I put it over. As soon as we landed I had to take up certain matters concerning it

with my firm—telegraph them—wait for telegrams back—a million details that had to be carried through. You see, dear"—his brown eyes grew even more serious—"I had to do this—make good—because of you. But I never dreamed it would make me too late.

"Gosh!" He mopped his brow. "I never meant to keep you waiting at the church, darling! Then, when I got there late—found you gone—of course I didn't blame you! But"—he glanced at Mrs. Conners appealingly, at Kathy hopelessly—"I wouldn't blame you a bit if you never forgave me, dear. It was a dreadful thing for me to do. Do—do you suppose you can *ever* forgive me, dear?"

"Why, I...I..." Kathy wasn't sure whether she was going to laugh or cry. "Of course I forgive you, Jimmy..." As though she wouldn't forgive him anything he might do! "But I—you—I—"

But Jimmy didn't wait for her to finish. He grabbed her in his arms; he held her tightly; he kissed her again as he had kissed her that night on the boat.

"Oh!" Kathy gasped in a tiny thin voice when she finally could—and then decided, rather wisely, not to say anything more just then. Some day, of course, she would explain to Jimmy. Explain that it had been *she* who had left *him* waiting at the church—ask him to please forgive *her*. But not now.

"Sweet," Jimmy murmured, "will you believe that nothing on earth—*nothing*—can keep me this next time from being on time at the church?"

"I believe you," Kathy said, smiling deep into his serious, grave, brown eyes. "We'll have a real wedding, Jimmy. I have a white satin dress and a lacey bridal veil. I'll tell all the girls—Alma and Helene and Lucy—oh, it will be the most wonderful, the most perfect wedding! And I *know*, Jimmy, dear, that you won't keep me waiting at the church."

"I'll be there hours and hours ahead of time," Jimmy promised solemnly.

And so he was.

Returning

I NEVER lived until this very day,
  Until I found you standing by my side
Whispering, pretending to be gay
  While you cried.

Two tears of silver hung from brimming eyes
  In the moonlight's glow. You tried so hard to smile
Gayly, wondering if I heard your sighs
  All the while.

I knew you would return, however much
  It hurt your haughty pride to come to me
Repentant, longing for the kiss, the touch
  That used to be.

—Bert Murray Fliegman

BETTY-LOU'S LOVE QUEST

The Picture on the Cover

PART III

Cupid Weeps

DON was a little grouchy that day, anyway. Then Betty-Lou kept him waiting at the tennis courts for three-quarters of an hour. Not that she wasn't worth waiting for, but, after all, if you're dying to play tennis with the One Girl in the World, and have engaged a court for ten and some one else is going to have it at eleven—well, anyway, Don was a bit grouchy.

So when Betty-Lou came dancing out of the hotel in her fetching sports costume, swinging her racket and wearing over one ear a rakish béret that only pretended to keep her riotous curls in order, he wanted to be appeased. And Betty-Lou, usually tactful, was oblivious of any necessity to appease him. She was full of a Thrilling New Idea.

"Oh, Don, what do you think?" she cried. "I've just been talking to Mr. Hathaway, and he wants me to walk in the Bathing Beauty Parade !!!!!"

Now, Mr. Hathaway was the self-appointed master of ceremonies at Hawxhurst Beach. More than once Don had seen him gazing appreciatively and appraisingly at Betty-Lou. Confound his impudence! And as if that weren't bad enough, he was a stunning-looking fellow besides—at least, the women all thought so. Don considered him a total loss.

So he stated, rather than questioned.

"Of course you declined with thanks."

Betty-Lou made round eyes at him. As a matter of fact, she was undecided, but if Don was going to take that proprietary air with her, really—

"Oh, I don't know," she replied vaguely. "It would be rather fun."

"Fun!" exclaimed Don, with a sound that could be described only as snorting. "Fun! To make an exhibition of yourself for all the riffraff and loafers in New York to goggle at. Parading along that boardwalk in a one-piece bathing suit that's as good as nothing at all—"

"You've never seemed to think me immodest when we were in bathing," said Betty-Lou, with a dangerous little note in her voice and a look in her eye that a wise man would have heeded. And, indeed, Don is usually not unwise. But this time he answered:

"It's different on the beach. But

you've never sat on those bleachers and heard the remarks the fellows pass as the girls come along."

"I guess it won't hurt me," said Betty-Lou, a little sarcastically. "It will be a new experience."

"It will be an experience you'll never have," Don told her through his teeth. "I'm not going to have my girl expose herself to it!"

"Your girl?" she repeated innocently. "Who is she, pray?"

"You know who she is darned well! And I won't have it!"

"I don't recall," said Betty-Lou sedately, "ever giving you the right to be the arbiter in my affairs!" Then she changed the subject. "I think you're feeling quite warm enough already, without playing tennis," she added, in a tone he had never heard from her before. Something in it chilled his hot blood and made him wish immediately that he had tried a different line. He took a step toward her, half held out his hands.

But she had turned her back on him and was walking deliberately away. So he, too, wheeled, and strode off in the opposite direction.

How completely one little hour, and a few incautious words, can change the face of all the world! She wasn't his girl, wasn't she? She wouldn't consider his wishes at all? Well, that, Don thought bitterly, was that.

TO BE CONTINUED

NEXT: "LEFT ALONE." On the Cover of the August 9th Issue

ON SALE ON ALL NEWSSTANDS AUGUST 6th

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Two-tone reproductions of this month's cover will be sent free to readers while they last. But we have had made only a certain number and cannot guarantee yours unless you are among the first to write in. They are popular —so hurry!

THE EDITORS,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway, New York City.

Please send me, free, a two-tone reproduction of the cover of the July 26 issue, without type and suitable for framing.

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Coming Next Issue

SLOWLY a look of horror came into Annie's face. "Are *you* the girl that Chester married?"

She shrank down into the chair and put her small cold hands before her eyes.

And suddenly it dawned on Inez that Annie had not been seeking *her* at all, but Chester's wife. She seized her friend by the shoulders.

"Look up here," she commanded. "Tell me what's the matter! Annie, Annie, dear, don't be afraid. I'm Inez, who loves you. Tell me why you came. *What is it that you know about my husband?*"

Annie did look up then. "I ought to be brave and go away," she said. "I ought not to tell you. But I'm so tired. Inez—Inez—I'm married to him, too!"

And then, as Inez stared at her, she thrust her hand down inside her blouse and drew out a ribbon on which was strung a ring. She held it up so that the other could see the inscription: *Chester to Annie, 1928.*

"I've got so thin that I can't wear it any more," she said pitifully.

The turmoil in Inez's mind was beyond description. Her throat felt as if it would burst. Grasping it with one hand, she rose and backed away, until the wall stopped her. Twice she strove to speak, without success; then the words broke through; her voice sounded hoarse and strange in her own ears.

"Annie? *My* husband? You are sure it's the same?"

"I saw him down town in the crowd last night," said Annie, "and followed him home to this house. I rang the bell and asked the woman if he's living here, and she said he is and that he's married. I went home then, to try to think what to do; I lay awake all night, trying to think what to do. Then I thought I'd come and see his wife—see her—you—"

"But I'm not his wife," Inez whispered, "if he was married first to you."

WAS SHE A WIFE?

By AMITA FAIRGRIEVE

A story by one of the most popular love story authors that will grip you from the first sentence. It will bring a lump to your throat and linger on in your mind for days.

If you don't want to miss the best story that has appeared in a love story magazine for a long time, don't fail to be on hand to buy your copy of ALL-STORY on August 6th.

ALL-STORY MAGAZINE—August 9th

ON ALL NEWS-STANDS AUGUST 6th

Planets of Destiny

By CAROL YOUNG

BY the application of the scientific principles of astrology your questions will be answered in these pages. But the publishers of this magazine, and also the conductor of this department, do not hold themselves responsible for the accuracy of the replies, inasmuch as many readers furnish incorrect birth data and others do not know the hour of their birth. This department is conducted only for such help or interest as readers may obtain from it.

One question is allowed each reader. Question must be accompanied by coupon to be found at the end of this department. Please do not ask questions concerning death, speculation or the whereabouts of lost property.

It is very important that you give the following data: time of birth (hour of the day or night), date, month, year and place. Also sex.

No personal questions will be answered by direct mail, but if you will send ten cents in stamps to cover cost of mailing, All-Story will be glad to return to you a short estimate of your character and of the future influences for those in your Zodiacal sign, giving suggestions for at least the next two years.

DAILY ASTROLOGICAL GUIDE

For the Next Two Weeks

July 26—A bad day for worrying about money and dealing with your elders; think it all over, but defer action till better results are promised.

July 27—Don't try to play guessing games with your bank account or your emotions—that is, if you want to win—for you might miss the right answer.

July 28—Steer around trouble to-day; the most dangerous kind is the kind you're apt to manufacture for yourself with anger, haste and fear; don't do it.

July 29—A fairly good day, compared to the way they have been running lately; but not strong enough for really big or important matters.

July 30—This one, too, is fairly good; but make no important changes before mid-afternoon, mentally or physically; guard the tongue when with women.

July 31—Generally poor rays from the planets to-day; don't trust your first guess; look everything over very carefully before deciding permanently.

August 1—Be careful in all relationships with those above you; don't try to force your luck and don't ask for favors—hold off and wait.

August 2—This is the sort of day when you're apt to think you're right when you're not; don't try to fool any one, especially yourself.

August 3—A pleasant afternoon and evening promised to-day, but go slow in the morning and early afternoon.

August 4—The morning is much better than the afternoon and evening; in the evening, control all the emotions; ask little of the opposite sex.

August 5—A good day mentally; if your judgment says to move, do so, but not until afternoon or evening, for the morning doesn't appear so sure.

August 6—Negative and unsatisfactory all the way through; things that look good to-day are apt to be just the reverse, so don't trust them.

August 7—A good day; afternoon is the strongest part, so get in your best work while the rays from the planets are smiling on your efforts.

August 8—This morning appears good, but the afternoon and evening are so doubtful that the wise person will think at least twice before deciding.

"WHEN SHOULD I MARRY?"

Come on! Ask me! Ask me!

You can't make me mad asking me when you should take the most important step in any one's life—marriage. And not only do I like to have you ask me, but I am also glad to tell you what the planets have to say about it. I have worked out a system by which I make the necessary calculations accurately in a comparatively short time and can thus hand out answers on this question in large doses.

Here's what I do:

When I have your birthday before me, I look to see when, according to my tables of planetary motion, you will have your *next* good indication for making the correct decision in regard to a partner for life. Which reminds me that there is a foolish notion going around that we only have one chance in a lifetime to get the right mate. That is all bosh. If you have been thinking along that line, forget it. 'Taint so! We all have numerous opportunities to marry wisely and well.

The big trouble seems to be that a lot of people get to brooding over the matter and start worrying about it till they begin to think they have passed the last matrimonial opening that will come their way. Then, when somebody else who is equally mistaken about the same matter comes along, they both think this is positively the final time marriage will be offered to them and dash madly away to the City Hall and buy a license to quarrel from then on.

When people have a big problem to meet—and marriage is one of the biggest—they ought to put a decent amount of consideration on it. Don't be in a hurry. Look over all the prospects and see how you feel about the whole thing, looking at it from every possible angle. Don't fool yourself. Don't get married just because you want to be married. That is, don't marry merely for the sake of doing what everybody else is doing, or because you think you would like it, or because some condition in your state of singleness isn't everything you might wish it to be.

When the planets say you can decide this important point accurately is when to put your serious thinking cap on and analyze the whole situation. There will be some one at the time who will also be willing the same as you are, and if your calm judgment agrees that all is well, go ahead and get married.

But when the time is wrong for deciding, you might just as well not try to stretch and twist your inner voice's judgment, for whoever is on the other end of the proposition will be the wrong one.

About having more than one chance to marry: as I said, we all have more than one opportunity to make a wise selection. But in this limited space I cannot undertake to tell you *all* you will have; so I give you the *next* one. Take what I say as the right answer—there will be none between now and the time I give you as your next opportunity to decide on marriage. Get interested in something else between now and then; it won't do you any good to fume and fret about it. Turn down all proposals till then if you want to be happy.

Here's the list for this time. First the initials, then the birthday, then the period during which matrimony can be successfully decided on and entered into by that person, if he or she wants to at the time.

L. W., February 14, 1906—February or September, 1934.

J. M., March 10, 1916—September, 1942.

C. W., December 5, 1911—August, 1936.

E. S., November 11, 1912—January, 1935.

L. B., February 7, 1913—December, 1933, or July and August, 1934.

M. P. S., August 13, 1909—October, 1931, or June, 1932.

D. E. I., November 10, 1909—May, 1931.

V. W., May 25, 1911—September, 1933.

Pet, March 16, 1908—November, 1942.

L. B., July 5, 1887—August, 1930 (this year), but December, 1934, is better for you, if you want to wait.

Green Eyes, August 5, 1904—September, 1931.

R. A., October 20, 1912—April or September, 1934.

M. E. D., October 14, 1907—February, 1934.

B. G., October 2, 1910—February or October, 1933.

E. H., March 22, 1913—July, 1931.
K. M., August 18, 1913—April or October, 1936.
E. B. P., April 11, 1915—October, 1936.
M. D., January 17, 1909—August, 1933.
D. McD., July 7, 1914—August, 1935.
B. H. D., November 14, 1909—February, 1935.
M. K., January 4, 1895—October, 1932.
E. K., January 11, 1911—July, 1933.
Mrs. E. R., September 11, 1904—March, 1941.
E. K., August 10, 1910—October, 1931.
F. F., August 11, 1899—June or October, 1931.
T. R., December 27, 1910—September, 1932.
E. P. W., June 21, 1893—October, 1934.
B. M., April 17, 1911—July, 1932, but it would be better to wait till November, 1936.
O. P., May 31, 1910—October, 1933.
G. E., February 7, 1913—August, 1934.
A. E. B., January 5, 1898—October, 1932.
M. E. O'N., November 12, 1911—January, 1935.
Z. L., August 10, 1908—October, 1931.
H. C. T., October 9, 1911—November, 1933.
M. J., January 30, 1908 (?)—January, 1938.
R. W., September 3, 1912—January, 1937.
M. G., February 6, 1905—July, 1934.
M. L. B., January 2, 1912—April, 1933.
D. Van D., April 23, 1911—December, 1936.
I. R., June 10, 1903—August, 1941.
R. A., November 9, 1912—December, 1934.
M. P., July 1, 1897—August, 1930 (this year), or November, 1934.
C. N., April 26, 1902—September, 1932.
M. A. W., November 19, 1910—October, 1935.
E. M. C., May 30, 1900—October, 1933.
Sandy, April 14, 1910—March, 1936.
D. B., November 10, 1913—January, 1935.
M. E. T., January 1, 1914—January, 1937.
E. H., December 19, 1909—July, 1932.

Occupation? There are a great many correspondents of this department who do not seem to know what they want to do; yet I must give them credit for wanting to do something. It certainly is better than being trained or expert at some line and so lazy they don't apply themselves. The other day I heard a contractor begging a man to come and lay bricks on a building job at ten dollars a day and the workman was refusing because brick laying wasn't his line of work—he was a plasterer! Later the same day I overheard the same plasterer complaining to a couple of friends that his family was starving because he couldn't get work. He was talking about this terrible unemployment situation. Don't ever get to be like that.

But, just the same, ambition or not, I don't see how I can undertake to answer all the questions that come in here about occupation—there are so many. I can give you a tip here and there, but I shall have to be mighty brief with those who do not indicate what they would like to do. Surely, you must have some preference. Let me know what it is when asking about occupation; it will help me a lot in answering you. Here are a few tips:

Mrs. B. A., November 12, 1906, art, music, liquids—avoid financial and mechanical lines. E. M. K., January, 1911, domestic work, better with women than with men—avoid literary effort. C. H. A., July 20, 1908, something connected with routine in dealing with concrete matters and objects. Mrs. P. P., April 25, 1905, imaginative and inventive things connected with older people, mostly women. V. J. D., May 15, 1909, work for those of the opposite sex—avoid financial occupations and those younger than yourself. Mrs. V. G., January 14, 1902, cultivate the favor and recognition of those above you who have money and work for them.

C. J. d'A., August 28, 1901, accounting, working with an inventor or in connection with transportation—avoid dealing with women. Mrs. D. W., August 14, 1910, philosophy, travel, showmanship, publicity, mechanics are all good for you, but don't try to do them all at once. M. C., September 11, 1913, original work to be developed by yourself—avoid older people and large concerns; strong capacity for detail, but don't overlook the grand perspective. O. B. C., January 29, 1906, almost anything you put your head and hand to; politics, finances, mechanics—avoid hunches and too much imagination. T. F. N., October 27, 1902, something connected with the home of a mechanical or labor saving nature; let the public come to you and you can always sell whatever you are dealing in. Avoid foolish optimism.

M. W. B., August, 8, 1905, artistic, decorative, imaginative work, but don't take too much for granted when dealing with others. M. K. B., May 29, 1912, head and hand, selling, but avoid trying to meet the public in too general a manner; control your imagination or it may sink you. A. K., June 13, 1913, deal with and for children—avoid speculation and financial tricks; don't buy on time payments. V. E. K., July 12, 1906, mechanical work connected with homes and personal comfort—marriage partner can be of great help. C. C. McI., December 23, 1886, distribution, travel—avoid women and extravagance in occupation.

J. F., December 27, 1912, theatrical or governmental work; never expect to stay long

in one place—get a job where you can move about. E. H. G., September 19, 1897, secretary or other detail work with older man—look out for serious financial difficulty; be foresighted. W. S., November 30, 1911, artistic, philosophical, literary—avoid women and personal relationship with men with whom you may be working. Mrs. F. R., March 10, 1896, work for large institutions of a general type—avoid mechanical, traveling, literary and occupations dealing directly with women. Mrs. L. T., November 17, 1892, artistic or legal, but avoid financial and domestic work.

"Will I ever find any one else I love?" It almost makes me wonder if you are in love with yourself, Mrs. K. M., born April 30, 1902. I suppose you have been separated from your husband, although you don't say so. If that is the case, you ought to be interested in an older man any time now.

No, indeed, H. J., born December 24, 1901. Better find it out now than when it will be too late.

Can't undertake to select investments for you, P. K. L., born June 4, 1899. But next year will be better for such things as far as you are concerned—better than in 1930, whatever that means.

Getting out of debt is always more difficult than getting into it, Mrs. M. A., born February 11, 1905, as you know right well. Glad to say you are now in a position to get out if you will decide to make it a steady pull until you do. Nothing dangerous in the next couple of years as far as I can see.

THIS COUPON MUST ACCOMPANY EACH QUESTION ASKED

CAROL YOUNG
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway, New York City.

This coupon is not good after August 9. One question is allowed each reader.

Date of Birth..... ....., ... Time.....
MONTH DATE YEAR A.M. OR P.M.

Place..... Sex.....
MALE OR FEMALE

QUESTION:

.....

.....

Name.....

Street and No.....

City..... State.....

If you wish interpretation of your Zodiacal sign, inclose ten cents (see rules).

Handwriting and Happiness

By JOHN FRASER

JOHN FRASER, gifted handwriting expert, who has made a name for himself both in his native England and here in America, will analyze your handwriting. If you wish to know whether your sweetheart is the right man for you to marry, inclose samples of your own and your sweetheart's handwritings and address your letter to Mr. Fraser, care "Service for Sweethearts." If you wish his help in finding the profession for which you are best fitted, address him care "Your Career." For general reading, care "Character Analysis."

You may take advantage of one or any service, but a coupon must accompany each request for handwriting analysis. Coupon will be found at the end of this department.

Mr. Fraser bases his judgments on the scientific rules of graphology. In no case does he forecast the future or attempt to reveal the past. Scientific graphology undertakes only to reveal the inner secrets of your nature.

As many answers will be given on these pages as space permits. All other questions will be answered by mail. A stamped, addressed envelope must accompany your request for analysis.

ALTHOUGH I have had frequent spells of "mountainitis" during the past week, with a strong desire to forsake everything and go fishing, I have, so far, stuck to my job, and with a clear conscience endeavored to answer the increasing number of letters from readers who want help with their vocational problems.

With schools and colleges closed for the season, it is only natural that many graduates are spending their time trying to choose a vocation. The problem of how to make a living these days is a vital one, and something that puts the best of us to the acid test.

Just for this reason I am willing to forego an occasional game of golf, and a trip to my favorite stream, that I may be of service to readers of ALL-STORY. Judging by the hundreds of appreciatory letters I have received from young girls, as well as from older readers, I have reason to believe that my vocational department is "filling the bill" all right. If you have any such problem, don't hesitate to write me about it.

SERVICE FOR SWEETHEARTS

opinion of the character of the writer
Majory
handwriting reveal. I will
Charlie

(Miss Marjory W., Cincinnati, Ohio.) I would have been very much better pleased, Marjory, if I could have given you a word of congratulation on your choice of sweetheart, but as it is, I'm afraid it must be the other way about. Your two natures somehow just don't fit. What puzzles me most of all is how in the world did you two people take to each other. Charlie is of the earth earthy, while you have a very fine spiritual nature. You live with ideas, and gravitate to the higher and better things, while your fiancé is content with what he can handle and see. I hate to hurt your feelings in this way, but I would not be fair to my own conscience if I said otherwise. In my opinion, Charlie is of the vacillating type who is up one day and down the next. And in the matter of love, I don't think he would be very steadfast in his affection. The whole texture of your own handwriting impresses me with the fact that you are fragile and unassuming. There is nothing forceful or aggressive about you. I would say you would be well advised to look elsewhere for a soulmate, and, let us hope, your next choice may be the man who was meant for you. At any rate, he is somewhere in the world, and I advise you to wait.

analysis of my handwriting and am
Betty
a very good friend of mine,—
Henry

(Miss Betty S., Oakland, Cal.) I discover that you have many things in common with Henry and, as a result, I foresee a very happy time in store for you when the honeymoon is a thing of the past. Your sweetheart is the more emotional of the two. He is quick and sensitive, cultured and romantic; while you are somewhat idealistic in your mode of thinking. Since you are both thinkers, I wouldn't be surprised if you differed widely in your opinions about men and things. You are both impulsive and "get off the handle" rather quickly, and your differences may easily resolve into severe tiffs, if not properly handled. In other words, Henry is opinionated and apt to be bulldoggish when his mind is made up to do something; and you are not far behind him in this respect. If your future husband is a wise man he will study you carefully. You are a girl of moods, with very strong likes and dislikes. You are both analytical in your thinking and this makes it all the harder for you to see eye to eye with each other. My advice to you both is "stop, look and consider" before you plunge into any argument. After all, what does it matter if your views on external things are different, so long as your love for each other is strong and steadfast? I would advise you two to get married, and to bear and forbear with each other.

Your analysis of my handwriting
Ruth
most illuminating and I was
Bert
8

(Miss Ruth S., Buffalo, N. Y.) I'm afraid your suspicions are correct, and I'm glad your own intuition has found it out. Bert has nothing in common with you whatever. It is not his fault. It is yours. Your nature is far too cold and formal. His disposition is the opposite. This boy has all the geniality of a parish sister who called on me the other day

—she told me she was collecting money for the "friendless and needless." Her graciousness was something to admire, but her sales talk broke my heart. I merely mention this incident in passing since your boy friend has the same suavity of manner possessed by the nervous parish sister. He is talkative and fond of airing his opinions. He impresses me as a man with an objective, and one who will stop at nothing to get to it. You, on the other hand, have not developed mentally. Your perception is dull for a girl of your age—twenty-three. Your mode of thinking is poor. Your obstinacy is stupid, and your temper is worse. I'm sorry to say all this, Ruth, but since you asked me to be quite candid with you, I'm simply following your instructions. I think you would be all the better to take up some study in your spare time. Read good literature, and give your mind something to do. You would be well advised to give up thinking of marriage for another ten years. By that time I would hope your outlook on life would be wider, and your whole character more satisfactory than it is at present. You can afford to wait.

YOUR CAREER

enough to analyze

(Miss Joan M., Tulsa, Okla.) Your buoyancy and ambition to get on in the business world is characteristic of your whole make-up. I would call you a real optimist, and one who has every chance of reaching the top in whatever profession you choose. I would imagine a nature like yours, with so much vim and enthusiasm, would be a valuable asset to some organization looking for an outside representative. Your bright vivacious manner, and your faculty for making friendships should place you in the forefront in the selling profession. Real estate would be a profitable branch of work for you. I'm sure you would never be easily discouraged however hard the sale was. You apparently realize that true success is all backbone, with no wishbone about it. Another strong quality you possess is your logical mind. You evidently take time to look through a proposition from beginning to end before you give your decision. Of course, your propensity to talk is always something to be careful about. Fluency of speech is all right in the real estate business, but not so commendable in private or social life. When you leave the office be sure to change your rôle, and become a good listener. It would pay you to remember this.

We especially enjoyed

(Miss Georgina E., Cleveland, Ohio.) By your pointed pen strokes, I see at once that your forte is the legal profession. Your power of judgment and penetration is good, and your faculty for reasoning is out of the ordinary. I must say, however, that you have a good opinion of yourself, and you know how to get a thing if you make up your mind to go after it. It is true that you are clever, but you have by no means got the monopoly of this acquisition. Before you go any farther, Georgina—and, by the way, you haven't gone very far on the highway of life so far—let me remind you that few men or women are important in this world, and certainly no one is necessary—not even you or I. The people who get too big for their shoes are apt to finish up barefooted. One thing that I'm sure comes easy to you is talking. Your fluency in the English language should help you considerably in the legal profession. But think twice before you speak once, and by so doing you will avoid a lot of trouble. Though you have the makings of a successful person, you still require lots of mental adjusting.

for your criticism

(Miss Harriet N., Sherbrooke, Que.) Your penmanship impresses me with the fact that you have lots of business ability. You are also of a sentimental nature. Judging by your letter, office work apparently appeals to you more than anything else. You have an analytical mind, with the result that you get a "kick" out of research work and attending to details. I agree with you in what you say about your literary ability. Though you may never become an Elinor Glyn or a George Sand, you have certain qualifications that might be developed. On the other hand, as a business woman you are remarkable, and ought to do well as secretary to some busy executive. Your age is right, and if I were you I would strive to secure such a berth, if not in your own town then in a near-by city like Montreal. Socially, you are a good mixer, and doubtless can make friends everywhere you go. I like your sincere, candid manner and straightforward principles. There is nothing cheap nor tawdry about you. In my opinion

you have a wonderful chance to succeed. Good luck to you.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

please advise me

(Miss Jessie D., Chicago, Ill.) It is your nature to be suave and kindly. You ought to have many friendships to your credit. Everywhere you go, I'm sure you leave a little bit of sunshine behind you. You seem to possess that rare faculty—a gift from the gods—of knowing how to meet people on their own level, and of making them feel at home in your presence. I could never imagine a girl of your tact making social errors. You would always say the right thing at the right time, and be exceedingly gracious to every one with whom you came in contact. As I turn my searchlight on your negative qualities, I cannot help seeing a few feminine foibles. For example, you are a splendid hand at working yourself into a frenzy of excitement when things don't go your way. When your pride—or your self-complacency—is wounded and disturbed, you become irritable and peppery. At such moments your actions and words are unworthy of you. If you were married, I can well understand what would happen to hubby after the guests left if he happened to "let his tongue slip." You would simply play the deuce with the ol' boy. Apart from these spasmodic outbursts you are really a practical girl, and one who is conscientious and trustworthy in all she does. You are head and shoulders above many of your sisters in intellect and in plain gumption.

a host of good friends

(Miss Rosa B. P., Brooklyn, N. Y.) Yours is an essentially "Scotch" handwriting. It is as tight as some of us who come from the other side of the Atlantic. It indicates a nature that is fond of fretting and worrying over nothing at all. I'm afraid, Rosa, you are apt to let minor and unimportant things obscure your vision of life's bigger values. Before it is too late, you should strive to get away from yourself. Make up your mind to spend and be spent for the good of others. The formation of your capital letters bespeaks a certain egotism and sensitiveness with regard to your social position. Since you come from the highlands of Scotland, as you told me in your letter, I can quite understand that inherent pride which is to be found in a person like yourself who can trace her ancestry back to Bonnie Prince Charlie. I don't blame you for being proud of the blood you have in your veins. The trouble, however, is, Rosa, this pride of birth has no value in Wall Street. The American public doesn't care a hoot whether your blood is "blue" or red. When all is said and done, you have nothing to be ashamed of. Your name may never appear in the head lines of our newspapers, but you *are* writing your name on human hearts.

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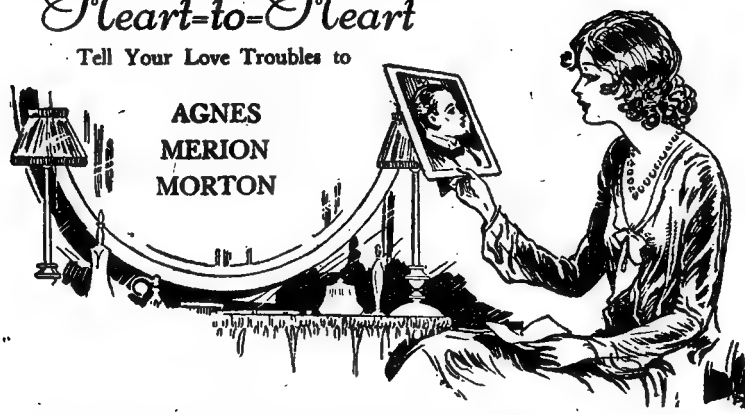

MRS. MORTON wants you to feel that she is a friend—some one to whom it is a comfort to tell your problems, who will advise and encourage you in your struggle for happiness, and who is always here to help. She is interested in you. Write to her freely, addressing your letter care All-Story Magazine, 280 Broadway, N. Y. C.

Every letter is confidential.

As Mrs. Morton receives so many letters, she cannot publish answers to all in the space allotted to her. Some, therefore, are answered by mail. Be sure to enclose a stamped, addressed envelope with your question.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I am not coming to you with tears or a family fuss. I want to tell you my trouble and ask you for at least a wee bit of advice, a lot of it if you can find time for it. I married at the age of nineteen years; my husband was forty-two. We have been married five years.

My husband is my ideal of what a man should be—good, kind, a good provider, well-liked, does not drink, isn't lazy, very neat, clean, treats me with a very great respect, and is always grateful for anything I can do for him. Neither is he jealous or mean-tempered.

But here is my heartache: when he is home he spends his time reading or sleeping. He used to like to dance, but says he can't stand night life any longer. I never ask him to go out during the week, because he works too hard, but I think on Saturday night, after he has slept all afternoon, he should try to please me. I am not so modern that I think two or three o'clock Sunday morning is the time to go home; he knows that I like to get home early. But he won't take me. I can't go alone, so here I sit, lonely, wishing for a good time and feeling sorry for myself.

I haven't any children, Mrs. Morton, so I have been thinking of leaving him for some time. Do you think I would be doing right? We are not suited in any way; we do not care for the same things. He goes where he likes by himself, and I have to do the same, if I go at all. I will not be offended at anything you have to say, Mrs. Morton. It will indeed make me very happy to receive any sort of advice. Please forgive me for this long letter, and I will be very grateful to you for any answer.

PEGGY.

Peggy, I warn you in the beginning that I always try to save a marriage if I can. Particularly when there are so many possibilities for happiness as there are with you. You and your husband are far apart in age, certainly, and very often it is hard for people so separated to meet on a common plane. But you have nothing against him as a man—he is your "ideal," and so few men are that, that you should not give up one who is without a struggle.

Does he know how you feel? Does he know

how important it is to you to have some relaxation together? That you actually have been thinking of going away on account of it? Have you talked it over with him? You would be entirely within your rights in putting it up to him that he should see to it that you have a good time, just once a week, on Saturday nights, and that you insist upon it. You can do this in a pleasant way, without antagonizing him. I am sure that if he understood how much it matters to you, he would be considerate. He would not want his home broken up for the lack of a little effort on his part.

And you need something to do about as badly as any one I know of—some interesting and constructive work to employ your idle hours. Are there no organizations for civil or social work in your town in which you could become interested? School or charity or church certainly must offer something, or you could take an extension course at the university in some subject for which you have a natural taste.

The majority of us, Peggy, find that marriage is not the dream of bliss we were brought up to imagine it would be. Some sort of compromise is almost always necessary. But so long as there is no other man or woman in the case, and so long as your man is good and kind to you, certainly you should not try a drastic thing like separation without trying hard to make an adjustment. "Look before you leap," Peggy—this is just what I say to girls hovering on the brink of matrimony. You might find that you had only exchanged the frying pan for the fire, and it isn't such a very hot frying pan now, is it? Think of the women who never get a decent word or kind look from their husbands. Of the women who have to put up with drunkenness and vice and every sort of neglect and abuse. Don't run away from a man like yours without trying every other possible course first.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I have been a constant reader of ALL-STORY since the first issue, and I have taken a fancy to your pages, so am coming to you for advice. Three years ago I was introduced to a swell-looking man and I knew he was the man for me as soon as I saw him. He was just my type of man. We at once became sweethearts and were engaged to be married as soon as we were financially able. H. was a great lover of drinks and parties, but as I did not approve of them he would not go.

Everything went smoothly for about a year until I went home on a vacation, and one of my boy friends gave me a diamond ring. When I returned to my work H. insisted on knowing all about the ring. I told him the truth. I had never cared for the boy that gave it to me, and it had never crossed my mind that he cared for me. We were merely good friends. H. did not want me to wear his ring and the boy friend's, too, so for spite he started drinking and going on parties again.

I made my get-away one night when he was on a tear, and got another job many miles away. He was only eighteen days finding out where I had gone, and came to see me before I knew he knew where I was. We made up and both thought that we loved each other all the more. He came to see me one night and I heard him talking to a girl I thought was a friend of mine on the porch. I listened, and he was telling her the same thing that he had been telling me for eighteen months.

I left again without his knowing why, when, what, and how. Two days later he was fired for drinking—he had got a job in the town I'd moved to, "to be near me," (he said). He writes to my mother asking about me and wanting my address, but mother will not tell him. Only yesterday I had a letter from one of my girl friends inclosing one of his in which he begged her for my address or just a word about me. She refuses to tell him because she knows I want him to suffer and wonder just as I have.

I met a very nice young man several months ago that has taken a great interest in me. He is wonderful, and says I am the only girl that he has ever seen that he could love. He is nice, doesn't drink or have bad habits, but when I am with him I am always thinking of H. and wondering why he can't be like Dan. I have left Dan just as I did H. I have come here to try to forget all the past, but I cannot be satisfied.

What must I do, give H. another chance, or marry Dan? I know Dan loves me, but as I said before, H. is "the man" for me, although I have my doubts that I am the girl for him since I heard him talking to the supposed girl friend.

ANITA B.

Do you really want me to tell you what I think, or are you asking me to assure you that it would be all right to go ahead with one or the other of these young men?

Why do you feel that you have to get married at all just yet, while your feelings are so unsettled? It would not be fair to Dan to marry him, and it would not be safe for yourself to marry H., so if I were you I'd wait a while. Anita, the best way to conquer your wayward heart would be not to run away all the time, but to take up some work that would satisfy you, give your mind and body employment, and engross you to such an extent that you would not have the time to brood so much. You speak of your "job." Is it a satisfying one—one that is big enough for you? If it is, then you will have to get a hobby, too, in conjunction with it, and ride that hobby to death.

You don't love H., Anita. You don't love the man who drinks, and debases himself, and lies. You love only your own ideal of what he ought to be. Since he has shown so plainly that he is *not* that ideal, you must know that you are only rushing to your own destruction in persisting in caring for him. There is no misery more miserable than an unhappy marriage, and this man is constitutionally incapable of making a woman happy. He can't help it, perhaps—it's the way he was made. And your chief allure now is that you are inaccessible to him. If he had you he would not be true to you for a year, nor even pretend to be. It is the curse of such men that they cannot be faithful—and the curse of women that those men often have apparently lovable traits that make them more desirable than the steady, secure kind.

Anita, the girl who wrote me that thoughtful, analytical letter has too much sense to throw herself away on one who is not worthy. I have seen him only through your prejudiced eyes, yet I know he is not worthy. You would be risking the happiness of your lifetime for the sake of a brief period of thrills and passion. *Don't do it.* Stop, look, and listen. The engine has whistled its unmistakable warning. Don't insist on crossing the tracks while the danger signal is on.

As for Dan, he sounds as if he is all that is really desirable in a man, but unless your own heart tells you so, it would be a mistake to marry him. What he could give you is infinitely more precious, infinitely rarer, than what the other could give you. But your heart, as well as your head, should tell you that before you risk it with him, either. You see, the man may still be in the offing, Anita, still to enter into your life. The man you can love with both heart and head. So it would be better to wait. We learn to love by loving. When the true love comes we realize that all other loves were but a preparation for it. So, be patient, and strong, and brave, and make up your mind to get over H.—to crowd him out of your heart—and make room for the love about which you need have no doubts.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I've been a reader of ALL-STORY for quite a while, and of course your column comes first before the stories. It's so interesting. I just had to write to Marilyn of California. Under no circumstances, Marilyn, marry a man older than you are, or one who quarrels with you because you're active and like wholesome fun. It can't be love if you hear music and forget him so quickly. It's only infatuation. I, too, was that way once, and I married the man and lived close on to eight years with him. All my pleasure was innocent fun. He'd take me to dances and then raise the roof off and accuse me unjustly of everything under the sun. I left him three times. He'd promise not to do it again, and I'd go back, and then it would be the same thing over and over. I'll tell the world I was nearly crazy. But it was O.K. for him to be out all hours of the night, and it was always "business" and the clubs. Well, I got wise and divorced him.

He died, and then I married a childhood sweetheart, who is one year older than I, and we are happy and it's the kind of love that lasts, not the other. And we don't quarrel over our pleasures or anything else. He trusts me implicitly. And are we happy? We've been married over three years and have our own home and are out of debt. If I want to play kid it's all right with hubby, and if I want to dance he takes me. But he doesn't dance, and I've got so I don't care for other men to put their arms around me. So I stay away, and we go fishing, biking, to shows, picnics, baseball games together. Hubby bowls, so I learned how to, and now I am on his team and he is captain. And every Sunday finds us at Mass on our knees together. Our furniture is paid for, and there's a nice little bank account. We are supremely happy, contented, and still very much in love.

So, Marilyn, find a man of your own tastes, one who really loves you and whom you can really love.

Eileen Ray, that man is not worth your little finger; he's just no good. How about your duty to dad, mother, and society at large? You and Bobbie both ought to thank your lucky stars for seeing these men in their true colors now. Still you're silly enough to worry about 'em. That's the bunk!

Blue Betty, shame on you. Cheer up. I wish I was fat instead of the skinny runt I am. Will close, Mrs. Morton. Suppose this will go into the wastebasket, but some of these girls are so foolish. I was once, too, but no more. Must get my lover's lunch ready as he's working midnight shift. Best wishes to ALL-STORY generally, and your department especially.

HUBBY'S FLAPPER FANNY.

Mamie—Love is something that comes and goes on its own wings. I am afraid I have no prescription that will win back your fickle sweetheart's love—if we can use that sacred word to describe his feelings. All I can offer is a prescription for yourself, and I don't suppose you will take it until time has taught you what I am saying now. He isn't worth what he is costing you. Be thankful that you've found him out before it is too late. Read the letter that precedes this, and take it to heart. It might have been written for you.

Unknown Friend, Maryland—You will have to remain "unknown," of course, if you will not sign your name. I cannot reach you by mail without knowing it, and you ask me not to answer through this column, so please write again and tell me who you are.

In closing, I am printing a letter without an answer because I wish to leave it open for discussion. What do you think, you men and women who read this department, Glen Sutherland should do?

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I wonder if you could give me some advice on my problem. I'd like to have some disinterested person's opinion. I'm in love with a man four years my senior. We're in our late twenties and have been going together four years. He thinks a lot of me, fully as much as I do of him. He's always so thoughtful, kind, and nice to me. We've talked of marrying a great many times, but he has an invalid mother (is her only child) and she is very jealous of him. She has heart attacks very often—sometimes I think they are a bluff to keep her son all to herself, because she has them at the most convenient times. If he mentions marriage to her she always asks him to think of her a little, that she won't be here long to bother him, and so on. Of course he loves her. She has given up her whole life for him, and she expects a life in return. She is very nice to me, invites me to dinner often and to spend week-ends with them, but I guess it is just because he asks her to—at least, I feel it is.

About two months ago I told him we'd either have to get married or stop going together, that I wasn't getting any younger and I couldn't be wasting my time. He said he was sorry, but couldn't do any different; he'd stick to his mother as long as she lived. Money is no object, as he has plenty for everything. He said he loved me and would never love any one else. If I married any other man he'd be the most unhappy person in the world. I was his ideal, and he'd never marry any one else. I stopped going out with him and went with other men for several weeks. He called up every day, sometimes twice a day, just to hear my voice and know I was all right. He asked me again and again to go out with him, but I'd always say that I'd better not.

Then I suddenly had a chance to do a big service to him and his mother. It meant a sacrifice for me, but I went through with it, because I wanted to. Since then his mother has called up and told me what a dear girl I am, and she'd never forget it as long as she lived. He asked me when I wanted to be married; he couldn't get along without me any more. I said I'd like to married in September, and he said let it be October because he will have some time off then. He didn't get away this summer because the office was short-handed. Now he wants to wait until spring. He says his mother would just pine away. I suppose she will, so I must be put off again and again. Shall I give him up or carry on another six months? If I mention getting married he doesn't want to be rushed. I love him, and he does me, but I hate to be made a fool of.

The best years of my life were spent getting an education, and I had no time for men. I have a good position now—am an officer in this company I work for—and have several men friends who have asked me to go out with them at different times, although none of them have been serious as yet. Of course, I make enough to live comfortably on, if I never marry, even in New York. But there is no reason why we couldn't all be happy together. We went into Cartier's last week, and looked at diamonds, and he promised to get me one, but now his mother says it will take all his ready cash to fix up the house. They have a lovely place in Westchester County, and she is always having it improved and rebuilt and added to. She likes to have men around the house that she can boss. But I think she is just doing it this time to keep us from getting married so soon. She is also always working on his sympathy and love for her. He wants to be married as much as I do, but we hate to make her unhappy.

I've written an awfully long letter, but it has relieved my feelings. I'd like you to answer right away by mail, but you may print this if you care to. I wonder if any of your readers have been through this same thing, and what they did about it. I don't mean, Mrs. Morton, that any other men are in love with me. Possibly some one else would be if I gave him a chance, but somehow none of them count. I shall be glad of anything you say to me, or anything other readers may say, no matter what it is.

GLEN SUTHERLAND.

The Lonesome Club

Conducted by DOROTHEA DALE

MAKE friends! Join the Lonesome Club and soon you will be getting more letters than any one you know.

Here's how to do it: if you wish your letter published in these pages write to Mrs. Dale, care of ALL-STORY, *280 Broadway, New York City, and describe yourself. Try to make it as interesting as possible—tell little things about yourself that will make others want to write to you.*

If you wish to communicate with the pals whose letters appear here, inclose your letter in a plain, stamped envelope and send it to Mrs. Dale. No letters will be forwarded without the extra stamp.

If you are a girl, you may write to other girls; if a man, to other men.

Please do not ask for the address of any one.

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I am a girl of eighteen, five feet five and a half inches tall, weigh one hundred and fifty. I have black hair and eyes, also have a medium dark complexion, as I am French-Italian. I love sports of all kinds, especially football. So come on, girls, write. I'll exchange snapshots, and will answer all letters.

CATHIE OF NEWPORT.

Will you please find me some pen pals? I am a mother of three children, but get so lonesome and blue, anyway. My husband is a bus driver from here to other towns, and is gone all the time—gets home late at night. I am a brunette with blue eyes, and weigh one hundred and ten. I have two sons and one little girl. One son is seven, the girl three, and the baby fifteen months. Love all sports, but love to read and write letters best of all. I am twenty-seven years old and have been married nine years.

LONESOME MOTHER.

Can you find room in some corner for a lame duck of Long Island? I am not lonesome, but enjoy writing letters and receiving interesting ones from different parts of the country, and will promise any one who may care to write some very interesting stories about my travels and adventures during the past twenty years. I am thirty-two, five feet six and a half, weighing one hundred and fifty-one. Dark brown eyes and hair, ruddy complexion, sober and energetic with a business sort of disposition. Am fond of all good clean sport, and a good mixer in a crowd, but of a quiet nature. Swim and dance well, too! I enjoy perfect health and take pride in protection of same. I was born in the Sunny South, and reared in extreme Middle West. Am an ex-cowboy, sailor, and ranger, with six years' service with Army and two in the A. E. F. In civilian life I follow bridge building as a structural steel man. There are several large bridges I have worked on from coast to coast; the last one was the Ambassador, Detroit, which is next to the Hudson River Bridge in size. Have worked in mines and on railroads in several places in South America, but of all countries there is none to compare with *our own good old U. S. A.!* I am of Spanish, French, Scotch and Cherokee descent, and I have found Spanish girls are true friends, and so are Indian girls.

LAME DUCK OF LONG ISLAND.

I'm a married girl of twenty-two, have reddish blond hair and green eyes, five feet six, and slim—fond of sports, books, music and shows. A good dancer, too, but best of all I like to receive and write letters, so come on, girls from everywhere, be you married or single, and write to

BUDDY OF ALABAMA.

I am a junior in high school, have blue eyes, fair complexion, am five feet seven, weigh one hundred and twenty, and would like some pen pals. I like all sports and can dance pretty well. I'm not so much for clothes, although I admire them on other people. I am always sincere and not a hasty judge of character. Please let me have many pen pals between fifteen and twenty. My friends call me

SETER.

I am just another stenographer. My home is in Florida and during the summer months business is slow for us. I have loads of time to write letters, and so I am asking you to help me find some pen pals. I am short, dark, and quite popular. Oh, yes, I am nineteen, and I dance, swim, and play tennis. I will exchange snaps and answer all letters. To my friends I am just

SHORTY.

I am a Canadian girl of twenty, five feet two, gray eyes and dark hair. Weigh one hundred and twelve. I just love writing and receiving letters, so come on, pals, sling some ink my way and I can promise some interesting replies. Thank you, Mrs. Dale.

"IT'S ONLY ME."

I am sure there is always room for one more, and I would love to hear from people all over the world, and shall try my best to return just as interesting letters as I know I shall get. I live on the bank of Lake Erie. I am twenty-two, blue-eyed, brown-haired, and stand about five feet five. So here I am waiting anxiously for some one to drop a line to

OHIO FRAN.

I'm a girl past my fifteenth birthday. Brown wavy hair and brown eyes. I'm fond of all sports, especially aviation. I'd particularly enjoy hearing from Western or Southern girls, and would also like to exchange snapshots.

A NEW YORKER.

Believe me, your Lonesome Club is sure great for a lonely pal like me, because it seems as if I have some friends already, even though they are far away. I am a young man twenty-one years old, five feet eight, weigh one hundred and thirty-eight, dark blond hair, brown eyes, not bad to look at—so some people say. I am a home-loving person, and do not go to public places where gambling games are played. I would rather stay home and read. Every evening coming home from work, I look in the mailbox, thinking that maybe some one has written to me, but find it empty. But I never give up hoping. I have an older brother and sister, but they don't seem to like my ways, and if I should hear from somebody it sure would give me a great deal of pleasure. Here's hoping they have to give the mailman an extra bag to carry my letters from all my friends!

A LONELY CHICAGO PAL.

I am sixteen, tall, blond hair and blue eyes, and weigh one hundred and ten. I love all sports, especially dancing and tennis. Will promise to answer all letters and also exchange pictures.

ELIZABETH K.

Whoopee! Who will answer my call for pen pals? I am married, have three lovely kiddies (I'll say so), am twenty-seven years old, five feet five, weigh about one hundred and sixty. Love to read, cook, etc. I am lonesome, as we do not know any of the neighbors yet, and am quite busy, but will answer all letters I receive. Come one, come all! Pen a few lines to

DOLLY, GRAY EYES.

Bring on a shower—oh, I mean a shower of letters. This is station M. E., and I'm sending out an S O S for pen pals. I am a beauty operator, twenty-one, with auburn hair and brown eyes. Yes, I'm slim, and you could call me tall. Next to letter-writing, I like motoring, dancing, music, sports, and what have you? Here's hoping I receive a letter from every State in the Union!

MODERN MISS.

I am a boy of eighteen, manly build, six feet one and a half inches tall, and weigh one hundred and seventy-eight. Have black hair and blue eyes, and am considered good-looking. I was born in Kansas, soon moved to Missouri, and came to Hawaii in 1927. I was a four-letter man at high school, football, basketball, swimming, and track. Was class president junior year, and a frat man.

I live in Hawaii, where love rules all—shut your eyes and think of yourself in a canoe under a Honolulu moon, and your lover at your side crooning love songs and strumming on his guitar. He stops—takes you in his arms—tells you he loves you, and—oh, please somebody write me, will you?

LOVER FROM HAWAII.

I am a peppy little blonde with curly hair, blue-gray eyes, fair complexion, five feet one, and standard weight. Am out for sports, especially swimming, tennis, skating, and dancing. Will exchange snapshots, if required. So c'mon girls, and ye who prefer blondes, I dare you to write to

RENER OF PENNSYLVANIA.

I am lonesome 'way out here in the woods, so far away from people. I came away from

California and am staying with my aunt in Minnesota. I'm a graduate of high school; my hobbies are most dancing, basket ball, football, riding, music, reading and writing letters. I have lots of letters to write, but wish to have more. I'm seventeen, five feet tall, one hundred and two pounds, have auburn curly hair, hazel eyes, am popular at dances, etc. People say I'm good-looking. So far as I'm concerned, I don't think so. Judge yourselves. Hope to hear from all pen pals who will write to a lonesome girl. Write everybody—make your hands go sixty miles an hour.

JUST DIMPLES OF MINNESOTA.

I am twenty-five years of age and of Jewish faith. Have brown hair and eyes, weigh one hundred and seventy. I would like to make friends with your readers.

MINNIE OF CHICAGO.

Am in the land of jungle trails and bamboo huts, Panama. Would love to exchange letters and photos with any one. Am twenty-six, five feet nine, weigh one hundred and sixty-five, black hair, brown eyes; come ahead, let's blaze a trail. I'll make it interesting for each and every one. Let's get together—what say?

JUNGLE JOE.

P. S. Count me in as a booster. ALL-STORY helps pass away many a dreary hour.

I am a young man twenty-four years old, only three years in this country, American-born, but my parents took me to Italy when I was six. I am five feet seven, dark brown hair, and people say I have a nice disposition. I am very fond of music and all sports. I hope you will find a girl who would be kind enough to communicate with me.

A LONESOME BELLHOP.

I am twenty-two, six feet tall, weigh one hundred and sixty, dark hair, and dark blue eyes. I like strange little stories that can be put in letters by young people. I write many curious and interesting things, and much of it I'm sure you will be interested in. I want to get lots of mail; I want lots of pen pals.

WALTER OF CHICAGO.

I am a young man of twenty-one, just recuperating from a serious operation, and find time dragging along very slowly. It will be quite a while before I can take up my old pastimes again. I'm not awfully bad to look at, providing you didn't look too long. I am fond of all sports, but my favorites are golfing, swimming, and dancing, also seeing how fast I can make the car go. I would like to have pen pals, and plenty of them. I can write very interesting letters, as I have traveled quite a lot—I have been to Paris, England, and in thirty-five of the United States, and can sure tell plenty of exciting adventures. I do not care for girls, so I hope none will answer, as I would not write back. I am a confirmed woman hater. I hope you won't think this letter dull and uninteresting, and will publish it, as I would like some pen pals very much.

CONNECTICUT YANKEE.

Useless speaking! Accidentally became nineteen the other day and realized I crave companions. Can qualify as a pen pal, being an expert with the pen (so I think), thereby crowning me Art Editor of our school's publications. As more proof of my ability with the pen, I point to the honor conferred upon me as best artist of the graduating class. I was chosen because at this time artists were deplorably lacking, and consequently, only as a last resort, was I chosen. I would like to communicate with art students, or anybody in particular. In fact, I'd even exchange letters with cartoonists. I cannot stress too greatly the fact that I am looking forward to receiving letters, and will exchange my likeness for every snapshot I receive.

JUST USELESS.

P. S. I would be glad to answer any questions pertaining to art if possible, and it might be possible—funnier things have happened.

P. S. No. 2. I like the girls!

All those who like to read thrilling letters write to me. I am lonely, and I have had plenty of love experience that I can tell you about. I am just past twenty, have the bluest eyes and chestnut-brown hair. I love outdoor sports, but would miss them any time to write to a pen pal, married or single, old or young, and will exchange snapshots with all who write. Give me just one chance to write you a thrilling letter. To the first twenty-five I hear from I will send two post card views of my little country town. Please write. You'll never regret the few cents you spend for postage.

LONESOME JIM FROM OLD PENNA.

I am very anxious to get some pen pals, as I have so much time to write letters and promise to answer all letters that I receive from any one from any place. Will give a sort of explanation of what I am like. I am twenty-seven years old, five feet eight, weigh one hundred and fifty, dark hair, fair complexion, and blue eyes. I am a fireman in a small city in California.

LONESOME FIREMAN.

I am a modern girl of nineteen. I have curly black hair, fair skin, gray eyes, am five feet five, weigh one hundred and twenty-seven. Have been all over the Lone Star State, and am now an Oklahoman. Won't some one please write me? I am considered very odd in looks. Why not see for yourself?

RED LIPS.

Three cheers for ALL-STORY! As long as it is on the market you will have one customer. Oh, Mrs. Dale, I want some pen pals, hun-

dreds and hundreds. I am so terribly lonesome. You see, I live in a little old one-horse town. Nothing to do but gossip with your neighbors. *I want some pen pals.* I am fifteen, sophomore in high, light brown hair, hazel eyes, weigh ninety-five, and am just five feet tall. Won't some of you girls write to me? Haven't I a twin? I was born on a famous American's birthday, February 12. So won't some of you girls write to me, even if you're not my twin? I will welcome you, and how!

LONESOME DOT.

I long to join the Lonesome Club and have just loads of pen pals. I am popular and they all say that I have the looks, but I'll let my friends judge for themselves. I am five feet two, weigh one hundred and twelve. I have red curly hair and blue eyes, fair complexion, and love all sports. Dancing is my main sport, and do I love to dance! I am in my eighteenth year and won't be very long before I have to add one more year to that. I have quit school and am planning on going to work when work picks up. I am home all day, so have plenty of time to answer letters, so come on, friends, write a few lines to

JERRY OF MICHIGAN.

The letters in your Lonesome Club sure are interesting. I love to read them. I would like to have more pen pals. I have many the way it is, but I want more, and your department serves the purpose. I am fifteen, will be sixteen July 20, five feet five, weigh one hundred and forty-five. I don't want any one to get afraid of me because I weigh that much—I'm not really fat. I have large blue eyes, black eyebrows and lashes, light brown hair. It's curly when I curl it, but straight as a toothpick other times. I am considered cute, but I don't know if they mean my looks or my knees. I want more pen pals, old or young, cross or kind, anybody—it doesn't make any difference to me. I hope my letter misses Mr. W. P. B.

WESTIE (of where the East says it's the woolly, wild West).

I am a girl of eighteen, have chestnut hair and gray-green eyes, five feet three, weigh one hundred and seventeen. Love all kinds of sports, and main hobby is dancing. Would love to hear from any part of the Union, and promise to answer all letters immediately and also exchange snapshots. Also promise long letters about this city. I have lots of friends, but still want more.

ANNA MAE OF PENNSYLVANIA.

I'd like to hear from girls about seventeen, college girls or Jewish girls in small towns in South or West, or in England and other foreign countries. But I don't think places mean so awfully much—what I want are good friends. I'm seventeen, a native New Yorker, tremendously interested in practically everything—sports, books, theater, movies, dancing, etc. My favorite sports are tennis and basket ball, and I also like hiking, swimming, rowing, et al. Am interested in things literary and might go to college next year to study journalism. At present I'm getting a secretarial training. I am a recent high school graduate. Am also interested in art, so will amateur artists please be paged.

SAY OF NEW YORK CITY.

I am married, fair hair, blue eyes, and inclined to be rather on the stout side. I have two lovely children. My hubby works nights most of the time, and I would love to have lots of pals to write to. I wonder if there are any married girls around my age who would write to me. I love going to the movies, and reading. I do want pals who are sincere, and will be looking for lots of letters.

MRS. S. B. OF CANADA.

Peek-a-boo! I won't say, "I see you," but I will say, "I'd like to hear from you." And I really mean it. I don't care who or what you are, how old, or how fat you are. Come one, come all, come great, come small. I'm letting the bars down to every one. What? You want me to describe myself? Mmn! Well, all right. I am sixteen years old, have golden-brown wavy hair, shoulder length; and I'm just five feet two. I just adore swimming, dancing, canoeing, and I'd like to learn to play tennis and ride horseback. Dancing I like the best of all. I can toe dance, do acrobatic stunts, and whatnot. Well, so long, old chaps. I'll be hearing from you soon, eh, what?

JUST BUD.

I'm just another lonely one who would like to join your great army of pen pals. I am twenty-one, American, white, five feet four, and tip the scales at one seventeen. I am graduating this June from high school, and from there to Harvard to become a doctor. I am very fond of all sports, my chief ones being horseback riding and swimming. I do hope some pen pals will write, and I'd like to exchange snapshots.

STAR.

I am sixteen years, have blue eyes, blond curly hair, and weigh one hundred and eight. I am a junior in high, interested in school work, and also all outdoor sports. I read all magazines, but have found ALL-STORY most interesting.

MARIE OF WISCONSIN.

I am around fifteen, have dark brown hair, and am considered good-looking. Five feet one and weigh one hundred and five. I go to junior high, and have several friends. Please send some letters to me.

I. P. OF DENVER.

I work as night operator and have lots of time to read, and I would like to have lots of pen pals. I am lonesome; my people are

all in Ireland—they went back after the war. I am thirty years old, five feet eleven, weigh one hundred and sixty-eight, dark brown eyes and hair, love dancing and all other sports. Served in the American Legion under the Canadian flag from 1915 to 1920, and came out of it O.K.

LONESOME TRAVELER.

Please publish my S O S, and you dear pen pals set your pens to work and write to poor lonesome me. I am nineteen, fair curly hair, blue eyes, my map isn't hard to look at. I'm five feet two and weigh one hundred and five, like all sports, also dancing and movies. My favorite hobby is daydreaming. I am very romantic and believe in real fairy tales. I have a fairly good sense of humor, and if you want to know any more, write and I'll have a lot of news to tell you. People from the West, and all over the world will be welcome. I used to be a man hater once, but I changed my mind.

DRAKIE FROM MANITOBA.

Am a girl of seventeen, brown hair and eyes, and would enjoy receiving letters. Will answer promptly. Love all outdoor sports, especially swimming. Like to dance, too. Will exchange snapshots.

RENEE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE.

I think letter writing is just loads of fun; this department will be such a help. Now I suppose you'd like to know what I look like—auburn hair, blue eyes, and fifteen years old. I attend high school and hope to have a prize for not missing. I like sports, especially tennis and swimming, and dancing is my weakness. I would like to remind you girls that I surely would exchange snapshots and souvenirs.

LORRAINE OF MAINE.

We are two lonesome brothers of western Oregon, and would like flocks of pen pals. We would like to see this printed in the Lonesome Club. My brother is sixteen and five feet six, while I am eighteen and five feet eight and a half. Both of us are blonds, with blue eyes. Our hobby is dancing, but we like horseback riding, fishing, swimming, and many other sports. We promise to answer all letters received promptly, and send a folding photo to our first writer.

BOB AND BILL OF OREGON.

I am seventeen and in fourth year high. I have black wavy hair and flirtatious brown eyes, light skin, dimples, and am five feet tall and slender. I am interested in outdoor sports and in ALL-STORY magazine.

MARJORIE OF WISCONSIN.

Would like to have some pen pals. I am white, twenty-nine, five feet six. Mother and father are dead, and I live all alone. Love to read, dance, also write letters. Have natural wavy hair, brown, with blue eyes.

BOX 463, TEXAS.

I want to hear from every one, married or single. I crave boating, swimming, and dancing. I'm a boy of nineteen, five feet ten, blue eyes, light hair, and O.K. by looks, and will exchange snapshots and souvenirs. My nickname is

SKEETER.

I am sixteen, with brown hair, blue eyes, and about five feet one and a half. I love all kinds of sports, dancing and skating favorites. I will answer all letters, exchange snapshots, postal cards, anything, if some one will only answer quick. I live near the water, so I have oodles of interesting and exciting things to write about. Some one give this little girl a break and write to

A LITTLE BROWNIE.

Bashful? Shame on you! "Are you nervous, embarrassed when in a crowd? Shy of strangers?" Don't be that way. But don't take it too hard, 'cause I want you all to write to me. Have I got "It"? That's the question. Believe it or not, I'm a girl of seventeen.

CALIFORNIA REDHEAD.

I am eighteen, five feet five, with dark brown hair and eyes, and love all kinds of sports, especially dancing. Come on, everybody, let's be friends. I know we'll have a jolly time answering each other's letters. This is something new to me, so I'm going to kick out of it, and if you want one, too, just write to me.

SMILING GIRL.

I am a boy of seventeen with dark hair and gray eyes. Would like to get some pen pals and welcome all. Will exchange snapshots.

GERALD OF MONTREAL.

I am very interested in having pen pals from all over the world. I am about five feet six, brown hair, blue eyes, and am not so bad-looking. I'll exchange pictures and will be very glad to answer all letters—all I receive.

LONESOME LOIS OF MISSOURI.

I want a pen pal, and I want her bad;
I want some one to keep me glad.
I'm five feet two, my hair is brown,
And people say I'm quite a clown.
I like to dance, to sing and play,
And to any new thrill, I shout Hey! Hey!
So come on, pen pals, old or young,
I'll answer each and every one.

HAPPY OF MICHIGAN.

I am five feet ten, weigh one hundred and eighty, blond, blue eyes, and considered an all-round athlete. I am a soldier in the Air Corps. At present I am doing a cabinet maker's work, but I expect to get a pilot's license in the near future. I have traveled a great deal, all the way from Kansas City to Chicago, and then I came to Panama. I guess I haven't much to interest people, but I am writing to you, hoping that you can find me

oodles of pen pals. I promise to answer everybody. I always have some bright remark to offer. My pals call me

OMAR THE TENT-MAKER.

Come on, kids, big, short, tall, fat, small, French, English, German, Spanish, American, or what-have-you, write. By the way, I write both French and English, and promise to answer every letter I receive in either language. Come on, you, write to me; when I say that I mean *you*—fill my mail box. It's not big, but fill it. I am sweet sixteen, five feet three, dark brown eyes, and my hair matches the test, you'll find, when you write to a

CANADIAN GIRL.

Elsie, the Idaho Cowgirl—How about letting me have the rest of your name, and your address, so that when your letter is printed I will have somewhere to send the answers?

Olive of Vancouver, and *Long Island City Pal,* I cannot print your letters unless I know your addresses. *Dissatisfied Peggy*—What is your last name?

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THE EDITORS,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway, New York City.

Here is my opinion of the stories in this issue:

Love Takes the Trail.....

The Spun Glass Tulip.....

Her Bartered Beauty.....

Broadcasting Love .....

More Precious Than Jewels.....

Gypsy Lover .....

The House That Love Built.....

A Prince for Cinderella.....

Taxi! .....

Waiting at the Church.....

My favorite authors are .....

Name .....

Address .....

(Name and address may be omitted, if desired)